

Tanto per Ridere
‘Just for a Laugh’:
The Functions of Humorous Narratives
in a Small Apennine Community

Licia Masoni

PhD
The University of Edinburgh
2007



I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, and that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree, diploma or similar award. Also I declare that all sources of information have been specifically acknowledged, all transcriptions and translations unless otherwise indicated are my own and all quotations distinguished are either marked by quotation marks or indented paragraphs.

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the functions of a corpus of humours narratives collected during fieldwork in Frassinoro, a small village in the Apennines, in Northern Italy. The focus is on their uses in daily interaction, at the time when the narratives were most popular – that is before the radical changes brought by the arrival of ready-made entertainments, such as radio and television.

The increase in the creation and exchange of humorous narratives in those days is seen as the result of a change in needs and tastes, whereby the old folkloric narratives – which had built the informants' worldview as children – were no longer functional. In their place, a more concrete kind of storytelling emerged, seemingly in response to new individual and group preoccupations. Following this assumption, the stories may be seen as means of negotiating identity at a time of accelerated social change through increased contacts with the outside world. The general context of the stories is studied to show how the restricted code on which they relied allowed everyone in the community to enjoy narrative rights to the stories, and how performing them conferred inclusion. After context, the themes of the narratives are analysed with emphasis on the fact that the stories appear to trigger laughter about a few main sources of anxiety or threat to the community. The analysis aims to illustrate how the individual and the group provoke laughter through skilfully tailored narratives as an alternative to direct discussion of fraught issues, thus avoiding conflicts, maintaining cohesion within the community and preserving its form. Far from being subversive in their intent, these narratives seem to be suggesting that in order to belong to a functioning community one must fully observe its structure and status roles, which proves to be an effective way of preserving the village's sense of identity during periods of rapid evolution.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost I thank my supervisors Dr John Shaw, Dr Emily Lyle and Professor William Gillies. Dr Shaw's most revealing classes on traditional narrative were my introduction to ethnology and, since then, he has never ceased to communicate his enthusiasm for narratives and share his great knowledge about them. Dr Lyle has been a constant source of guidance, support, encouragement and inspiration: I will always be indebted to her for the heart-warming kindness and infinite patience she has granted me throughout the writing of this work. Professor Gillies has on many occasions patiently, kindly, carefully and tirelessly listened to me, always shedding a ray of light with his insights on my thoughts and helping me verbalise my ideas. I thank him especially for the support he has given me and for the overwhelming dedication he has put into making sure my thoughts came through in this work.

Warm thanks go to everyone in the staff of the department of Celtic and Scottish Studies: they all made me feel at home and have granted me help in many ways. In particular I feel I could not have completed this work had it not been for the support and encouragement I received from Mrs Arnot McDonald, our librarian, Mrs Cathie Scott and Dr Neill Martin. To them go my heartfelt thanks.

I would also like to thank Mrs Kate Marshall for the kind help she has given me. A very special *grazie* goes to all the people in Frassinoro, in particular to Anna, Mario, Maria, Dino, Aldina, Fernando, Onelia, Ottavia, Martino, Alba and Sister Costanza who are all part of my life now. Thanks for taking me into their homes, for putting me up for the night, for sharing their thoughts and memories with me and for trusting me. I hope this work can convey even just in part the nature of their exciting minds. In particular this work has been made possible by the many conversations with Giacobbe Biondini and I feel so fortunate to have met him. I am deeply grateful also to Marco Piacentini for the enthusiasm he always showed for my work, for sharing his memories, insights and knowledge with me and for being always there when I called upon him. His contribution to this work is invaluable.

Last, come the people I thank most of all: my mother Silvana and my father Romolo who have never ceased to believe in me and whose unconditional love and capacity for making me laugh have allowed me to make it through this work; and my grandfather Mario Scolaro, the wittiest man I ever met, who could heal everything with a funny remark and to whose memory this thesis is entirely dedicated.

Al mio nonno Mario

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	9
1.1 Introduction	9
1.2 The village yesterday and today	13
1.3 Fieldwork and the discovery of the corpus	21
1.4 Theoretical approaches	28
1.5 Notes on Transcription	38
Chapter 2: Towards a More Concrete Kind of Storytelling	40
2.1 The restricted code	40
2.2 Changing tastes	52
2.3 The use of humour	72
Chapter 3: The Corpus	82
3.1 The emergence of the corpus	82
3.2 Classifying the corpus	121
3.3 Authors and tellers	124
Chapter 4: The Shared Knowledge Base Within the Stories	130
4.1 A system of shared knowledge	130
4.2 Social uses of the shared context	138
Chapter 5: The Stories That Elicit Laughter	149
5.1 <i>Laughing at</i> and <i>laughing with</i>	149
5.2 Starting humour as a response to group atmosphere	151
5.3 Placing the stigma: laughing at the odd one	158
5.4 The rebel	161
5.5 The comic butt	168
5.6 Playing the fool	177
5.7 Group power play: laughing at the others	189
5.8 Men and women	190
5.9 Young and old	208
5.10 Insiders and outsiders	215
5.11 Turning thoughts and feelings into events	229
Conclusion	236

Bibliography	245
Appendix 1: Definitions of Genres	262
Appendix 2: Four Examples of Folktales Collected in Frassinoro in the Original Transcriptions and in English translation: <i>Prezzemolina</i>; <i>L'Indovinello (The Riddle)</i>; <i>La Gaggia Magica (The Magic Crow)</i> and <i>Mezzettone</i>.	266
Appendix 3: The Original Transcriptions of the Humorous Narratives in the Corpus and Related Narratives	301
Appendix 4: Stills from the Video Interviews	320

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction.

I take laughter, and the stories eliciting it, to be fundamental means for discussing and coping with the surrounding reality. In humorous narratives, the small anecdotes that are repeated in interaction, we find a mirror of the community that exchanges them, of their preoccupations and worldview. These stories are a category of folk narrative in that they represent a strategy the community has adopted to construct and negotiate both individual identity in the face of community constraints and collective identity in the face of changes imposed by the outside. I analyse the stories with the underlying idea that they reflect a social change in the village which resulted in a movement of tastes towards a more concrete kind of storytelling – as opposed to the tales of magic that my informants had heard in their childhood – and which had in community laughter its main means of discussion.

This study concentrates on a village corpus of humorous narratives of various lengths, from punch-line stories to long anecdotes, all of which were collected in Frassinoro – a small village in the Apennines – between September 2003 and June 2006, from male and female informants who were all above eighty years of age at that time. The narratives included in the corpus were collected during two group interviews – the first occurred on the 20th of November 2003 and the second on the 24th of September 2005 – and during follow-up interviews started in December 2005, when I went to meet the people who had taken part in the second group interview in their homes, always as couples.

All the narratives in the corpus I present were composed in the past, that of my informants' youth. Although they still tell those stories on the very rare occasions in which they gather nowadays (when I gathered them for the first group interview,

some of them had not seen each other since the last funeral, or even for years), I decided to study the narratives against the background of the context for which they were conceived and in which they were composed. Broadly speaking, this is the period between the late 1920s (the time when my informants were children or young teenagers) and the early 1960s, when the changes imposed by the outside became evident and permanently affected the social life of the people.

One could argue that texts collected in the present cannot be studied in the context of the past, since they have changed through the memory of the interviewees who invariably recall them in ways that tend to validate their identity at the moment of the performance (Norrick 2005). However, I adduce two reasons why I believe it is possible to consider the texts in our corpus as very similar to their earlier versions of the forties and fifties. First of all the stories in the corpus were born as first-person accounts, but with an eye to being told by the group. This implied that they could be used by the tellers with a certain amount of freedom, but that they also had to keep their general community identity, in order to be received by the audience, and could therefore not be bent to personal aims. As a result, this community character of the stories acted as a preservative of their form, whereby I believe we can reasonably presume that they have not changed much. In addition, I would note that the stories express a worldview and values the people still embrace, which are reinforced during the performance and which are 'released in the air' during the performance as a shared context for receiving the texts. It is important to distinguish between the context for creating the story and that for telling it. I take the context for telling these humorous stories to be that of a situation of relaxed interaction, among people who share a strong knowledge of the context for creating. This means knowledge of the characters, of the places, of the ideas underlying the acts of the characters and more. Stories are out of context if the context for their creation is not present in the minds of teller and audience, and this certainly was not the case. As Glassie says, "Some of context is drawn in from the immediate situation, but more is drawn from memory. It is present, but invisible, inaudible. Contexts are mental associations woven around texts during performance to shape and complete them, to give meaning" (Glassie 1982: 33). And, as far as I could observe, the "mental associations" used to "shape and complete" – namely the worldview, morality and beliefs the interviewees shared

– were still the same on the day of the second group interview as they had been sixty years earlier.

On that day of September 2005, the more words and gestures the tellers wove together, the more their audience was reminded of the past as if it were being recreated around them, in the room. I watched them coming alive in the two hours we spent together that day. They all laughed for most of the time, many of them covering their faces with their hands, while weeping with laughter. They could not finish laughing for one story before they would start laughing for the next, as soon as the teller introduced it – “Well then...” – that was enough to get them going again, and the laughter would get loud within seconds, as soon as they recognised the story. I could observe women forming a symbolic group, playing a role between teasing – playfully questioning the truth of the statements – and supporting the men. The men, on the other hand, were figuratively elbowing each other with looks that they exchanged, and supporting each other in the conducting of the laughter: a look was enough to convey to the friend that it was time to laugh. Although set in the present, I believe that the second group interview in particular could be considered, with very good approximation, a re-enactment of similar occasions set in the past.

Stories bring back “old ways of speaking” which sometimes embody ideas that have been abandoned, but most of the time, they mark a “refusal to accept new world order and mores, a conviction that the old ways were fine and anger that younger people are making everything so complicated” (Norrick 2005). This element was present in the interviews, and acted as a reinforcing agent during the performance. However, the people I met were special and had had, at the age of eighty or more, time to question their past – by honestly comparing it to the life of today’s youth. As Norrick observes about older tellers:

Not surprisingly, given their years of experience and time to re-consider past events and their consequences, older narrators tend to offer multiple perspectives on the past, providing both initial and retrospective evaluation. Retrospective re-assessment follows from long and varied experience and, hence, it presents a natural resource for storytellers old enough to have had the time to re-evaluate events (Norrick 2005).

These “multiple perspectives on the past” produced a metacommentary – by which I mean their opinions, impressions and reflections on their past and heritage – which was invaluable. However, this did not mean that they had completely changed their perspective on life, but just that they could look at it from other perspectives. Deep inside, however, they still embraced the old ways: after all, older narrators “have gone through whole sets of changes in customs and ways of speaking, and they cannot be expected to accommodate constantly, especially when telling stories” (Norrick 2005). For all these reasons, I feel I can assume that they plunged back into the past on that day of September. The interviews that followed the collection of the corpus were therefore spent trying to visualise images of the past through the people’s words, adding clues, faces, voices, colours, smells and landscapes to a mental picture which was going to provide a background for the analysis of the corpus¹.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, I provide information about life in the village, my fieldwork there and also define my theoretical approach, in the context of previous scholarship in the field. In Chapter 2 I consider how traditional narratives, proverbs and other forms of communication had the function of transmitting context to the people and forming their identity since their early years, and how these narratives were able to communicate ideas of structure and status roles; and then move on to considering the genres the interviewees enjoyed as adults. In Chapter 3 I present the corpus of humorous stories that emerged in the course of fieldwork and consider also how these were defined within the community. In Chapter 4 I focus on the system of shared knowledge sustaining the stories and its uses. In Chapter 5 I explore laughter in interaction, considering both individuals and groups.

¹ I did have the aid of external observers, the village teachers. During my fieldwork I was lucky enough to find the diaries that the teachers of the village had kept as part of their duty. I read the diaries written from 1920 to those just before the Second World War, where an incredulous teacher writes about the beginning of the conflict. The teachers, all from outside the village, write about the general activities of the school, but they often digress into small narratives of daily life, capturing details of the life of the people, whom they describe as terribly poor and resistant to changes. Also contributing to putting together a picture of those years were the Frassinorese Father Aldo and Sister Costanza. They both left the village when they were teenagers and they have lived away ever since, apart from annual visits. They have both lived in very different realities, Padre Aldo being a missionary in Third World countries and Sister Costanza having been sent to various cities in Italy. They therefore had a chance to look at the village from another point of view, and find new meaning in old ways.

1.2 The village yesterday and today.

Frassinoro² is a small village in the area of the Apennines between the regions of Emilia Romagna and Tuscany. Though the village itself is in the province of Modena, its territory marches with Lucca (Tuscany) on the south side and with the province of Reggio Emilia on the western side.



Fig.1 Map of Emilia Romagna.

From <http://www.italy-weather-and-maps.com/italy/maps/emiliaromagnamap.php>

The village lies at 1032 metres above sea level, and is surrounded by mountains, the most impressive of which is the *Monte Cimone* (lit. Big Peak Mountain). In winter-time, the mountains are of a dark brown, which, from a distance, has the texture of a furry coat, an effect due to the many thin branches of the leafless trees which form the forests that cover the mountains. The peaks are covered in snow and they remain so until April or May. By then, though, the mountains have already

² The legends say that the name Frassinoro is a contraction of *frassino d'oro*, 'golden ash-tree'.

changed their colour into a deep emerald green and they appear in all their flourishing beauty.

This contrast between winter and summer reflects the life in the village as it was in the past. The Frassinoresi experienced long harsh and desolate winters during which the community was halved by emigration and summers that were an explosion of life and characterised by the proliferation of community gatherings and interaction.

The Frassinoresi define themselves as a community of farmers and emigrants. As Sister Costanza noted, when I interviewed her:

Because up there [in the mountain] there was the emigration [the habit of emigrating], in the winter-time the men went to work in Sardinia [as lumberjacks]. [...] And so they spent the winter there, they earned something and then they would come back in spring time. [...] Like the girls, they would go in service in the cities.

Most men went “*alla Macchia*”. *Macchia* (lit. spot, stain, but also used for a “spot of vegetation”, or a wood) is how people refer to the woods. The nearest and most popular locations were the ones in the mountain area of the Maremma, in Tuscany, or the woods of Sardinia. After All Souls, the men would start forming the *compagnie* (companies) who were leaving for the *Macchia*, to work as lumberjacks. They would then leave and not come back until the following April, experiencing the harshness of long hours of labour, in often inhuman conditions. Other men travelled as far as Algeria and other parts of North Africa, to work as builders, miners and carpenters. As far as women were concerned, when still in their early teens they would leave home and their mothers and move to the neighbouring cities (Modena, Florence, Lucca, Pistoia, Prato, Rome, Milan) to find work in rich families.

The saddest day of the year was when the emigrants left, on the bus (*corriera*), around which everyone gathered to say goodbye. Those who left were given the *bensun*, a traditional cake that corresponds to many breads baked in fairytales to accompany people on their journeys. It symbolised the blessing of the family for those who emigrated or went off to the war.

Conversely, the happiest day in the year was when the people returned, and one could see the suit-cases piled up on top of the bus appearing from beyond the hill. This was the time when:

...also in Frassinoro there was work. There was the spring stuff to sow, the grass began to grow, the shepherds came back up [from the lowlands where they had spent the winter, back to the mountains], there were those who had the cows, the sheep and so on, and they had kept them in, they started sending them outside. And they could start to sow the wheat, the bit that could grow, and those who could, because they had fields further down the mountain, would also sow other things, which could grow where the climate was a bit warmer.

[...]

And then the men came back from Maremma and from Algeria. But the girls came back too [...] When my father came back home it used to be a great joy, because the mothers, like mine all the others, my mother used to clean the whole house, she would, for example, change the paper in all the glass cupboards, all these simple things which, however, meant that there was joy for dad's return. There is the joy of the return. [...] It was the moment of the encounters, of the return of the beloved, of the husband, there was a general, how can I say, a special atmosphere! (Sister Costanza)

The harshness of the winter, the solitude of a community deprived of its young people, the struggle of the women to keep the house going in the face of poverty: all of this was over and the people were back together. The peak of this feeling of unity and a community brought together was the 2nd of July, the day on which the village celebrated the feast of the *Madonna delle Grazie* (Our Lady of the Graces). It was the most cherished celebration, both for the immense love the people had for the Madonna and for their deep faith, but also because it represented the day on which everyone made a point of coming back; girls could meet their beloveds again and possibly, if they were lucky, get married and not have to leave on the following September.

In the summer-time, the villagers constantly led a community life. Frassinoro was in many respects like one family, where people shared duties beyond the immediate family boundaries. Old people, for example, would be called upon for advice, even if they were not related to the young man who needed it. In the same way the elderly

received help from young ones who did not even belong to the family but who organised themselves in groups and got the work of days done in a few hours. There was a sense of being a whole, a strong “*senso del paese*” (lit. sense of the village), as the people say, which translated itself into a feeling that efforts should be now shared among everyone. Working in the fields, building a new home, minding children, assisting an ill person, all was shared. This “sense of the *paese*” relied on the fundamental values of solidarity and communal help derived from the Christian faith, which was strong within the families, within which most of the religious education took place. This feeling of solidarity and “contact”, as Martino once defined it, was present all year long, but reached its apotheosis in the summer time.

After the long days of communal harvesting, the community would gather and eat and sing together, until late at night. Apart from special occasions, any evening was good for singing, dancing and telling jokes in the summer-time. They would meet in the *cortili* (courtyards):

In the houses’ courtyards, you know, for example, the courtyard of Marianna...[...] And they went out, maybe they stayed in the fresh air, because also then it used to be hot, no? And so they met there in the barn yard and there were children that played, young people who flirted, and then they sang, they would sing in a group, songs...It was really beautiful. Youth was made of that kind of enjoyment [...] And there were those who sang and those who whistled, or told, I don’t know, some jokes. It was all about being together, in company and laughing and joking (Aldina Tazioli)

In the evening, just in Casa Gianasi, there were three choirs. There was the one of *Cà du Russ* [area of the village³], there was the one of *Cà di Gnese*, and the one up there, in the *cortile* of *la Marianna*. One walked through the village and heard a choir, then walked up and there was another choir, then went further up and [he] could hear again another [choir] (Martino Ferrari)

On “those [summer] nights of full moon,” when everyone “could have fun together”, the women “would eat and then look forward to washing those two [few]

³ See below for explanation of the *Cà*.

plates to go out and join the others, for chatting or singing.” Here the young people were the prevailing age group and most of the genres performed were meant to facilitate interaction among them. For this purpose, jokes and anecdotes were preferred, because they were short and could be told in quantity. In order to be noticed by the beloved a young man would try to elicit laughter from the company. This was a moment when fast lines were needed, speed and accumulation were essential. The long international narratives which were told in the barns to create a warm parenthesis within the long and cold winters, and which were often serialised to help stretch nights into days, were no longer suitable for these summer gatherings. The summer stories could not be left half way through, as their effect was in their immediateness. People had to be able to move from one bunch to the other and to quickly join in a song that was being started. Telling was no longer an issue of teaching and passing the time, but of using that time productively, since the summer evenings had their main purpose in interaction and exchange: of narratives, of songs, of looks.

When everyone was back, Frassinoro was a place out of time and many of the texts collected in the village carry an imprint which seems to reveal that they were the product of the spirit of freedom and rejoicing of those summer nights. That freedom meant also not being *sotto padrone* (under a boss) any longer. Almost everyone in the village owned what the people refer to as “a bit of land”, “a field” and at times “a vegetable garden”, when the size was very reduced. In general, no one had much land and people worked at it within the family. The produce was often not enough for the family and “misery” was a condition that everyone experienced, and which acted as a sort of levelling agent in the community, whereby solidarity derived also from the feeling of a shared struggle. However, contrary to many places in the low lands, and especially in the neighbouring Tuscany (Falassi 1980), Frassinoro was not shaped by the *mezzadria*, or sharecropping. Some people did work for others, as *mezzadri* (sharecroppers)⁴, but only a handful of people, not enough to influence a society. In general then, the *padroni* were:

⁴ The main *padrone* was the priest, who, as was the case for all the clergy, could benefit from the ‘parish allowance’ (*beneficio parrocchiale*), which meant that he had people working his land and he got to keep 60 per cent of the profits. Fernando once remarked that this condition of work caused the complaints of a few people, but it never got to resentment. This reality is described in the village folktale of *Mezzettone*, which I give in Appendix 2.

All out! When we came back home we were like kings, because everyone had his bit of land. And God help those who dared touching it! Because they were defensive! Even when it came to the animals, with everything, because their bit of land was sacred! It could not be touched! It is still so today, right! (Giulio Cesare)

Although working at one's land was often done communally then, the people were also very protective of their property, also because it represented their own identity in the face of the anonymity felt in the outside. Contributing to a strong sense of identity, also within the village, there were territorial and symbolic boundaries which made the community look as though it was divided into many sub-communities according to various criteria, the first of which was geographical. Half way through the village there is a bridge, running above a little stream which runs through the village and divides it into two opposite parts: Frasnur and Cadgianas (lit. Gianas' house, where 'Gianas' is a contraction of the surname Giannasi). Nowadays they are perceived as two nominally different parts of the village, but at the time of the interviewees' youth they were very different indeed. Cadgianas was always the rural part of the village – though its distance from the central square is imperceptible on the map – while Frasnur, which is where the Common House lies, was the “urban” area where a few professionals, such as the teacher, lived and some people with higher education. Lying in a sort of neutral area, which belonged to everyone, was the village Romanesque cathedral, the Badia, which was felt as an integral part of the identity of the Frassinoresi.

Within the two sides of Cadgianas and Frasnur, the people were further subdivided into *Cà* (from *casa*, house), expressed in the local dialect⁵, or *casata* in Italian, which were geographical areas corresponding to a group of houses. So for example one had: “*Cà 'd Pelegr* [*Cà of Pelegr*] [...] where *Pelegr* was the nickname of the founder so to speak, of the first one [to live there].” The *Cà* was often a large area, where each son had built new houses around the first and lived there with their

⁵ Throughout this work I will use the word ‘dialect’ to refer to the local dialect spoken in Frassinoro, and the word ‘Italian’ to refer to standard Italian. This is because the people in Frassinoro (and indeed across Italy) normally distinguish between ‘dialetto’ and ‘Italiano’. This does not imply that these are two different languages; people do not say ‘standard Italian’, since the idea of standard is contained in the word ‘Italiano’.

own families. As new families were formed, each of their members was still coming from the same *Cà*, but was also defined as being of his own particular branch of the family: “those of”, ‘*quii di*’, followed by the father’s name or nickname, but often by the mother’s. So within *Cà d’ Pelegr* there were and still are “*qui d’ Sac*, there are *qui d’ Guerra*, there are *qui d’ Pacific*.”

The areas were geographical, as can be seen by the descriptions of the different summer gatherings above, but they also implied a sense of self-definition and pride as opposed to others, which influenced the way in which people participated in social life, namely not as individuals but as members of well-defined traditional subsets, which also served the purpose of providing continuity with the ancestors. So on the occasion of important religious processions, for example, the people would file organised in “confraternities”, ancient institutions with which each member was associated according to family lineage. In the same way, the right to set up the stations for the traditional living *Via Crucis* (Stations of the Cross) belonged exclusively to groups of families who had long owned the patches of land along the main road, which have hosted the station for years now. It would be impossible for an individual to join one group or another, without marrying into the family.

Apart from a few isolated cases, the ‘rivalry’ among subsets was constructive and generally took a creative form, which often culminated in the production of entertainments. So, for example, the *Maggio* – the village folk play in verse ⁶ – was an exclusive possession of Cadgainas, and Frassinoro had set up a music band to counter in kind. One year, Giulio Cesare remembers, the *Maggio* was sung beside the church, at the request of the priest, during a religious celebration. As the *maggiarini* (as the people who sing the *Maggio* are called) were singing, the music band of Frassinoro began to make as much noise as they could, to cover their voices. This was for the delight of everyone, and also represented a concrete expression of worship, as the Maggi and many other forms of art were also a way the people had to celebrate their Faith. The two dimensions of pride and Faith were strongly intertwined, and only today one can see the pride emerging more than the religious side, when talking to young people who say they “cannot be bothered to go to

⁶ See Appendix 1: Definitions of Genres. In the course of this work, I will refer to the genres of verbal art in the village with the original words, since it seems appropriate to identify each genre by its local name.

church”, and yet give up their free time and holidays to work hard to set up the stations of the *Via Crucis*.

Apart from the *Via Crucis*, however, and a revived form of the *Maggio*, nowadays most of the forms of self-made entertainments in the village have disappeared, and Frassinoro seems more similar to other villages in the area. The disappearance of self-made entertainments is always blamed on the television: “That thing is to blame!” (“*E’ colpa di quella là!*”). Not so much the first television set, but the many that followed in the sixties and seventies made community gathering redundant, according to the people:

In the old days, for example, there was a television set only in Emma’s house, where the bar is now, and so we all used to go there in the evening to watch serials, they were beautiful you know. Everyone liked them and there was always a crowd of people. Now everyone has got one [television] in their home and therefore....[No one gets together any longer]
(Pasquina)

Pasquina’s words echo what was said by many other people. When there was only one television set in the village, the storyteller was replaced, but not the storytelling experience and the sense of sharing, with comments and jokes that could originate from the images they were watching, but the arrival of many television sets put a stop to that. Also other novelties, such as stoves and central heating, brought about by the increasing wealth after the War, contributed to the disappearance of contexts for interaction. Once the people could be warm in their own houses, central heating replaced ‘human heating’. And the population began to decrease dramatically, since poverty after the war was “frightening” and entire families left for France and South and North America and never returned. The context for the *vegghia* disappeared also because of the departure of many of the witty people who had been the “soul of the company”.⁷

However, the context for interaction and the passing down of stories had not totally disappeared from the village. On a summer afternoon in 2004, on my way to an interview, I saw a crowd of men of all ages standing outside the bar, chatting

⁷ One of them was Iusun, who features in many of the stories in our corpus and who left for Argentina, and never managed to come back to Frassinoro, not even for a visit.

loudly and laughing even more. At that stage the bar was still providing a powerful meeting point where all ages could come together. As Fabio Turrini remarked: “that was where all the men of all ages met. All the ideas for silly jokes, or for good things that could be done for the village, started from there. We would all sit there and think of something to do, and then carry it out, all together.” It provided a place of cross-generational interaction and when it closed down in January 2006, the people suddenly lost an important part of their culture, as the new bars are too modern to make all ages feel comfortable. The closing of this bar led to the culmination of the process of fragmentation described above, and most of all it confirms the fact that the richness of the verbal art in Frassinoro relied on the community as a whole, where everyone, regardless of age, gender and social role, could be the target and inspiration for laughter and entertainments.

1.3 Fieldwork and the discovery of the corpus.

The fieldwork for this thesis took place over four years, from December 2002 to September 2006. The information was collected mostly with a small digital video camera and with an old Sony tape recorder.⁸ A few phone interviews were necessary as well, when I was writing in Edinburgh and a question came into my mind.

I first went to Frassinoro by chance, a few days after Christmas 2002, and I was introduced to Anna and Mario Bernardi, who became my first interviewees. During the four hours I spent with them that day I formed the idea that Frassinoro had been a special place once inhabited by people with a gift for composing verses and with a rare imagination and rhetorical abilities. Mario recited many lines for me, some of which had been composed by himself. As I found out, he was not the only one in the village to have composed verses, and rhyming for many different occasions was a very common entertainment when they were young. Together with locally composed verses – which comprised the scripts for the *Maggio* – the people of Mario’s father’s generation had known, and used to recite by heart, literary poems such as the *Gerusalemme Liberata*, by Torquato Tasso. What struck me was the range of self-made entertainments in the village. In the space of an afternoon Mario mentioned

⁸ I include a list of all my recordings in the Bibliography. All quotations in this work are from these field recordings, unless otherwise stated.

listening to long and beautifully recited folktales; setting up little plays, adapted from novels they had read; writing and reciting rhymes for weddings and for teasing the villagers; contests implying singing loudly and remembering as many verses as possible from the *Maggio*; the exchange of improvised witty verses, sung in the fields while working the land; pre-wedding rituals relying heavily on the verbal aspect, in which men of all ages displayed their wit.

Willing to explore all this I kept going back, initially mostly looking for folktales. This was due to the fact that Anna and Mario had told me the village used to have a most talented storyteller who used to tell stories that lasted days. His name was Massimo Bernardi, but every one referred to him as Barba Massum (*barba* meaning uncle), or more often Patriarca, which is how I will refer to him in this work. Anna said of him:

The Patriarca [...] he used to come to the house, right in our house to tell us *favole*⁹. And all of us with our mouths wide open, listening to these *favole*. But he used to make them up, this little old man. When he got to a point that he thought [was suitable], he stopped it [the *favola*] there. Then he would say, “Beh, then we’ll tell the other bit tomorrow night”. So he used to keep us going for months with these *favole*. Sometimes in the house, sometimes in the barn, with the cows...

“*A bocca aperta*”, open-mouthed, was an expression which I was to collect many other times, from each single interviewee who described their reaction to the stories of this phenomenal teller. Mario recalled that they knew he was about to tell a story, because he would take off his hat. And Maria remembers that “he was a distinguished man, while he told the *favole*, with his stick...If only we had had a video camera in those days! You should have seen him!” And she and the people in her family always made sure to find him a cigar and a glass of wine, when he visited, as an elderly man, in the winter nights. Most of the time however, he would tell stories in the barn, for a large group of people who had come “*a veglia*” (lit. to the vigil). *Veglia* (or *veggia*, in the dialect) was the ritualised evening gathering that took place on winter nights, in which people gathered to chat and listen to stories,

⁹ See *folia*, in Appendix 1, for definition of this narrative genre.

while benefiting from the heat of the animals, thus saving on wood. The women would carry on with their work of knitting and sewing and the elderly men would tell stories, from tales to narratives of the First World War, and descriptions of life at the *Macchia*, in America, or anywhere that the old and retired men had been. The Patriarca's repertory was huge, according to what people told me. He had read a reduced version of the *Arabian Nights* and could keep a "one-page-long story" going for "three nights". Although he also used to tell short folktales, he is mostly remembered for the tales of "Bagdad e Bassora (Basra)".

I was hoping to find out more about his repertoire, by means of the interviewees' memories. For this reason Anna directed me towards Giacobbe Biondini, who, she felt, would know the stories she and Mario could no longer remember and whom she contacted on the phone on my behalf. This is how I first met Giacobbe, then 86 years of age, who became my main informant for a good part of my fieldwork and a special friend.

Giacobbe did remember a few tales and it was to help him carrying on doing so, that I put together the first group interview in 2003, because he felt that the presence of others could help him "string [the stories] back together". Everyone I knew by then helped by suggesting names of possible informants and introducing me to most of them. Only one of them was not introduced to me, and this was Ottavia, who once called me from her window, as I was passing by, and asked me to "come and listen to [her]"; she had a story.

This attempt to put the Patriarca's repertoire together meant that, as I later realised, I was being kept within the area of Cadgianas, since he had lived in that area and had told stories there. For this reason, with a few exceptions, my research community eventually became Cadgianas, rather than the whole of Frassinoro.

During the first group interview, I asked specifically for the tales, but it soon became clear that no one, apart from Giacobbe, had any recollection of them. With the exception of a few female informants, who sometimes tell their grandchildren the animal tales which accompanied their own childhood, no one else had listened to a tale for decades, let alone told one. And the ones from the *Arabian Nights* had disappeared.

After all, this made sense. Everyone had been telling me that the winter population was always almost halved in the past. If tales were told in winter and if, as Aldina and other people summed it up, “only the ones who were lucky enough not to be at the *Macchia* or in service could go to *veglia*”, then many of the people of the village had not heard the tales of the Patriarca after the age of fifteen or so. This was the case for Dino, who had left to go to Algeria with his father at the age of ten and returned only after the war. When I met him he said: “I just have my life to speak about.” Also Fernando felt he could bring no contribution, because he had not “paid attention to them”.

However, Dino and Fernando had been pointed out to me as great “tellers”, and Dino certainly revealed himself as such on that day, when he told some of the jokes that are included in this corpus. As I later realised, another genre was emerging during the pauses between attempts to remember tales. During moments of relaxation for eating and drinking, Dino would start entertaining with village jokes, as if that was a break from the interview.

In December 2004 Giacobbe’s death put a temporary stop to my fieldwork. In our last interviews, knowing that we could not put together many tales, we had concentrated on discussing their structure, their function and meaning, the moral in them and issues of variation: Giacobbe had given me the most incredible insights. After his death, I kept going to see Dino and Aldina and others and took the tape recorder with me, but without a precise question in mind. I had given up folktales, as I felt I was trying to forcefully elicit material from people who could not remember them and I was waiting to see what came out of our conversations. With this spirit, I put together the second group interview, in 2005, and left the participants free to recount what they wished to recall. Due to the presence of Martino and his wife Alba, whom I had never approached before, but who were nevertheless good friends of all the others, the conversation soon took off in a relaxed spirit. It was similar to the moments of pause which had occurred in the first group interview, but with an added ease, possibly because we were in Dino’s living room that day. The new people were not aware of my previous requests about tales, only of the fact that I wanted to hear about the old times, as Aldina had told them. Altogether, they did not

seem to care about my expectations, but rather about pleasing each other and me, as if I were a member of the company, with stories.

Apart from the amount of laughter caused by the narratives they started to tell, I immediately understood that the performance of them was not creating any of the concerns about style, language, or ownership that tales had created.¹⁰ On the contrary, in the case of the humorous tales, people displayed great performance abilities, deriving from the fact that they felt they owned them. Those were the narratives of the people, the ones that all the men, and, in a later age, the women, could tell, and that everyone liked to listen to. They were narratives of interaction. One first proof of this was that, before the group interview – during one-to-one interviews, or in interviews with couples – the interviewees had never mentioned any of the stories in the corpus. It was clear that group interaction was the indispensable condition for the emergence of this genre. I decided to concentrate on this emerging corpus that day, because it felt like the only genre that was common to everyone, that reflected the essence of the villagers. The fact that every single person I had been interviewing since then felt they could take part, was for me a very good reason for deciding to concentrate on these stories.

With the interviewees a relationship of friendship was established with time. There were a few stages and moments in this getting to know each other which to me were particularly meaningful for this work as they speak of the people. One came near the beginning of the fieldwork, in 2003, when I went to see Giacobbe for the third time and he began the visit by making me sit down and asking me to tell him about Tony Blair and how he was perceived in Scotland,¹¹ “Are the people happy with their prime minister?” “What’s the news from up there?” he would ask with interest. That was the first time he asked me to ‘entertain’ him, and he then did it every time after that. I always had to tell him something in return for what he would then tell me. I often had the impression that that request turned me into a man like

¹⁰ People felt that folktales had to be told by storytellers, and could hardly think of a summarised or “badly told” tale, as the quality of the performance was one with the text to them. The same reaction, due to similar concerns with style, was observed by Anna-Leena Siikala (Siikala 1980: 171).

¹¹ I have to say that Giacobbe and a few Frassinorese are possibly among the few Italian people above 80 who know exactly where Scotland is. Their knowledge comes from the fact that a family from the village emigrated to Glasgow in the 1950s and regularly visits and keeps in contact with the people of the village. Giacobbe’s knowledge in particular was sufficiently detailed to know that Barra was an island near Scotland, since one of his favourite *Maggio* scripts had been adapted from the novel, by Elisabeth Helme, *St. Clair of the Isles, or the Outlaws of Barra* (1860).

him, putting us on equal ground. I felt that he was communicating to me that I was equal with him, because we could have an exchange. As soon as he would ask me the news, Maria always left the living room where we were about to sit down and Giacobbe would ask her to make us a coffee or give us a dram of anise liqueur – which is exactly what he used to do when Dino or another old male friend would pay him a visit.

A second moment came near the end of my fieldwork, but had been preceded by many similar ones. Only, this one stayed with me for some reason. Alba was telling me about what their dreams as girls were – getting married, having a family...I realised that her tone was very dismissive of the importance of that dream; as she began to make a comparison with the dreams about careers that women can have today, and concluded they were backward, I understood that she thought of me as someone who could not have the same aspirations as she had had, given that I had gone on to study and that I had been brought up in a city. I therefore said to her that I thought that getting married was still a very respectable and modern dream today, and from there onwards she relaxed and her tone changed dramatically. There were often moments like this, knots in the conversation that, once untied, suddenly left room for thoughts to flow.

In general, this change in tone and the consequent relaxation came together with the people's belief that I was forming a good knowledge and understanding of the context of the past. Besides, I had the impression that they felt I was on their side, because my image and opinion of their past had been formed by them, and not by other sources. I was therefore projecting an image of their past life which they approved of. Their communication and my understanding of the past worldview and community were facilitated by the fact that I was beginning to get a better grasp of their dialect, which they used regularly to communicate among themselves, and this allowed memories to flow more easily, carried by the sound of the dialect, which was most evocative, and brought people and situations back to their mind. For fear of interrupting the flow, I often kept questions about words I did not know for later, and asked Marco Piacentini, Frassinorese and expert of the dialect, who patiently taught me and added his memories to what I would tell him from a day of interviews.

Also the fact that I was getting to know the place and, most of all, who was related to whom, helped to establish the idea that I knew about the old days, and could therefore understand the spirit of what they were telling me: "Oh, but she knows!" Giacobbe once said to Maria who was trying to explain how two people in the village were related. Giacobbe often assumed that I knew things and this established complicity between us. A similar feeling certainly facilitated the conversations with the other interviewees, in 2005, after the group interview. By then, they seemed to take for granted that I could understand the spirit with which they were telling the stories. So much so that they could even allow me to tell them some of the old humorous narratives which I had heard from other interviewees.

In general, during these follow-up interviews which dealt with understanding the context for the stories, all the people spoke freely, trusting my choice of what material to use and what to hold back. In exercising this precious freedom I have decided not to reproduce certain categories of material, namely anything that could have bordered on gossip (which tended to emerge, given that I was dealing with narratives that relied on exposure of faults and vices) and which would have felt like a violation of the private sphere of my informants and of the memory of the people in the stories who were no longer living and whom I had grown to respect. Although I have done my best to avoid making statements or drawing conclusions based even in part on material excluded for these reasons, this has proved difficult on occasions, since each comment has invariably added a brush-stroke to my mental portrait of the village. However, I mostly concentrated on comments that had been uttered in the group situation, which made them into public statements everyone agreed upon, thus turning them into further clues for interpreting the general context. And among the more private thoughts and opinions I report only the ones with which the interviewees seemed to voice feelings they had been willing to articulate for a long time, such as social issues which they were happy for me to acknowledge.

I have done this on ethical grounds first of all, to honour their trust in me and to avoid anything that could have been misinterpreted if taken out of the context of the village. But there is also a professional aspect to this censorship: I felt that the stories were in many ways self-explanatory, as they carried the context that could explain them and that could give insight into why people created them and told them,

allowing us to recognise patterns in common with other realities outside Frassinoro. As a result, I decided to analyse the corpus from two main perspectives. One is local, that of the context of Frassinoro which I gathered from the interviews, while the other is a general one, whereby the stories can be seen as told not by the Frassinoresi but by individuals who were dealing with a group and its constraints and trying to find their way of surviving in it. Therefore, my explanations of possible reasons why people told stories are not due to an attempt to psychoanalyse the single author but to an interest in the texts as items that produced an effect in the group and which were constructed around mechanisms which I assume to be general and valid outside the village, such as the innate need to report events in changed ways, or to use self-disparaging narratives to negotiate one's inclusion into the group.

1.4 Theoretical approaches.

My approach to theory had to be eclectic. To understand laughter and explain narratives that stimulate it in Frassinoro, I have drawn on the terminology and categories of several disciplines. It is expedient to distinguish four main aspects: the social, the narrative, the laughter, and the individual.

My study is a community study. Looking at social organisation and community language habits was fundamental. Interaction was dependent on language and the language, the dialect, was clearly so important in Frassinoro that one could not help thinking it shaped the people. For Frassinoro society, despite literacy, was still largely based on oral communication and this was particularly true of the passing down of culture and worldview. So Frassinoro had to be looked at as a society based on orality. Yet it was equally clear that I was dealing with a society that had experienced great changes, i.e. the ones that occurred between my informants' generation and that of their parents. Messages transmitted had therefore had to be adapted to a new reality. For talking about this aspect, I was very much helped by Goody's account of the mechanisms for passing down knowledge – in face-to-face interaction – in what he calls “traditional society”, i.e. in pre-literate communities. Particularly useful were his views on how messages are adapted to preserve their sense and function, his formulation of the mechanism of “forgetting”, which occurs

when elements of the past are perceived as redundant in the present context (Goody 1967).

In dealing with the messages that shaped the values and worldview of the people I was most helped by Bernstein's concept of restricted codes on which societies rely for their cohesion (Bernstein 1971). In such societies, "deeply enmeshed in the immediate social structure, utterances have a double purpose: they convey information, yes, but they also express the social structure, embellish and reinforce it" (Douglas 2003: 25). By extension, this concept could be applied to a system of narratives forming a code by which people communicated their society's ideas and values. The "restricted code" relates to the information which one can take for granted. Hall helpfully distinguished what he calls high and low context. As he puts it "a high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalised in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message. A low-context (LC) communication is just opposite; i.e. the mass of the information is vested in the explicit code. Twins who have grown up together can and do communicate more economically (HC) than two lawyers in a courtroom during a trial (LC)" (Hall 1977: 91). This is echoed by the concept of "communicative economy" of which Foley speaks: audience and teller "enter the same arena and have recourse strictly to the dedicated language and presentational mode of the speech act they are undertaking, signals are decoded and gaps are bridged with extraordinary fluency, that is economy" (Foley 1995: 53).

The concept of "restricted code" translates readily into the analysis of the narratives in the corpus: for the narratives were evidently conceived for and performed within the same community. I therefore viewed the stories as having two main layers which could, for presentational purposes, be analysed separately, although the layers have no separate existence in fact. One layer is the context, where words are wells of meaning in terms of the associations they stimulate in the audience. This is the level at which the stories are rooted in the shared knowledge of the place, enabling them to become ever more specialised and to count as conservative tools for the community. This is the side of the stories that is "densely indexical in a concrete social sense" (Bauman 1986: 76). Here I have drawn on

Foley's concept "competent audience" (Foley 1995: 42) and on studies of narratives in performance, including Bauman 1986, Basso 1988, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1975, Dégh 1989, Dégh-Vàzsonyi 1971 and Lindahl 2001. In my scheme, this first layer of context comprises also the general situation in the story, that which provides the background for the personal experience narrated in the stories. At this point, I would invoke Shuman's notion that teenagers "understood the story as belonging to a certain category of experience and understood the general scenario of which the specific story was an example" (Shuman 1983: 172). For my purposes, the "general scenario" is part of the context that is known by everyone. The situation 'going to the market', for example, was known to all Frassinoresi. So I take that as part of the first layer; this "scenario" is the "category of experience". Rephrasing Shuman, I assume that stories are "examples" of a "category of experience", in which the first layer is the category of experience and the second is a specific personal experience within that category. The second layer is the variable part of the story, the one which supplies the specifics of the plot, and of which the audience has no prior knowledge (although we may suspect that, because a humorous story is known to be in progress, the audience will anticipate the general lines of the outcome). Indeed, as Bauman states, the freedom of the individual narrator is inevitably tied to the patterns of "storyability" he detects in his audience, which is very much the case for our study. The teller has a knowledge of what he can and cannot tell and how much he can roam, within pre-set parameters, according to his audience. One recalls that it is precisely for this 'limited roaming' that Stahl could argue that the personal experience narrative is a category of folklore, because it is built with material that is held in common with the audience, where each person shares "cultural clay" with the "I" of the personal narrative (Stahl 1989).

Although these studies of personal narratives proved extremely valuable, and Stahl's in particular, one of my problems was that most of my stories, having been generated as personal narratives, were then immediately subsumed into a group repertoire and exchanged among the men in the community. I therefore had to look at that "I" as a very fluid category, which readily became a "he", or a "you", with subsequent changes to the use and meaning of the story. Conversely, I had to allow for the possibility that stories had been composed in a way that allowed for, and

facilitated, a change of narrator. For this set of issues, I was helped by Bauman's discussions about "management of the point of view" (Bauman 1986: 33-53).

The change of point of view also required attention to issues of ownership or of "narrative rights" as Hymes put it (Hymes 1996). Hymes is most illuminating in his analysis of the relationship between narrative rights and "narrative ability", which he concludes do not always coincide in our society. By invoking "narrative ability", I found it possible to understand how my tellers achieved it and how much they relied on the audience to be competent in order for their ability to be effective. Another important idea that I was able to transfer from Hymes's context to my own was his concept of "norms of speaking", and norms of "interaction", as when he speaks about the Wasco people:

Indians do not themselves think of such a thing as 'their' culture. They use culture as we do popularly, for high culture, dances, fabricated material objects, things that can go in a museum and on a stage. Norms for speaking and performance go further into general norms of etiquette and interaction that are at the heart of certain qualities and problems, yet not explicitly acknowledged" (Hymes 1996: 118).

I could see this in the stories, since they were not recognised as a genre, or as a "tradition" by the Frassinorese, but just as "things" they used to tell, "just like that", "just for a laugh". Following this line I have found studies of conversational narratives (especially Norrick 1993 and 2000) most useful, for focusing on how narratives insert themselves into conversation, in the form of reported incidents used to clarify issues, practical examples brought to mind by association in place of abstract wording (Hymes 1996: 111).

Since the conversational narratives were evidently the narratives of interaction, I began to see my corpus as fundamentally made up of conversational narratives, facilitated by the flow of conversation. Somehow the same kind of narrative that Glassie observed at many *ceili* situations, at the centre of which, he said, there are the stories that "raise problems" (Glassie 1982). These are the narratives that address common problems, and which express people's feelings more than abstract discourse could do, as they rely on common worldview and familiar references, which

communicate their situation in a reassuring way that makes them feel connected to all those around them. Basso refers to something similar when he speaks of Apache narratives relying on place names as containers of meaning (Basso 1988). By increasing the density of references to communally shared material, the narrator draws strength from the common source. Their sense of community is reinforced, which is in itself a reassuring feeling.

Glassie lays great emphasis on the meaning the common culture has for the community, and never loses sight of the effects that incipient social changes, coming from outside, can have on the narratives of a people. This was important to me, as it was what I saw with my own eyes in Frassinoro. Glassie further observed in that context a movement towards more concrete storytelling, which was likewise important for Frassinoro. In fact, one thing I was most keenly interested in was identifying reasons for changes in tastes. Why did people feel that these more concrete genres could satisfy their needs? Indeed, what were those needs and how were they reflected in the themes of the narratives in my corpus? For this set of questions, I was helped greatly by the literature on gossip, its themes and its function of reinforcing status roles and personal identity (Abrahams 1970).

Many more studies of narrative in performance have influenced my work and are cited in their proper place. I have been conscious at all times of the need to concentrate on the audience, on "its reception and understanding of the performance" (Finnegan 1977: 243), but even more I would argue on the audience's relationship with the teller. For jokes are different from other narratives, in the sense that asserting a special alliance between teller and audience is actually, I submit, the purpose of the performance. The performance of local and familiar jokes focuses on an immediate result more than on anything else. That result is laughter, and it has a unique quality: it is heard! Laughter is something the community 'offers' to the teller. In jokes, more than in any other narrative context, the audience is active and determinant. If my assumptions are correct, I am dealing here with a very special kind of performance. Unfortunately, folkloristic studies about jokes, practical jokes and the trickster which I consulted seemed not to take the joking purpose of the stories into account: the laughter and its concomitant effects. I had therefore to draw on other disciplines, including branches of anthropology and theories of discursive

analysis, to illuminate the working of my humorous stories, exchanged within the small community of Frassinore, where the laughter is heard everywhere, bouncing off the walls of the houses. It is in the ramifications of *laughter with* and *laughter at* that the stories find their meanings.

One of the first lessons one learns when exploring the study of laughter is that laughter had little to do with humour. Equally, one must be prepared to forget connections between laughter and narrative. For when we deal with a society with a restricted code, just pronouncing the utterance “Hey” is enough to make people burst into laughter. Laughter occurs when it is needed, and stories are items with which we elicit laughter. This is in fact my central thesis. I stress the distinction because, although ‘humour’ and ‘laughter’ often appear to be used as if they were synonyms, as Chapman recalls, “laughter can be irrelevant to the study of humour, and vice versa, because each can be experienced independently of the other” (Chapman; Foot 1976: 3; Provine 2000, Glenn 2003).

With that caveat, one may turn briefly to the literature about humour. It is extensive, and follows many approaches. For matters of space, I cannot give a detailed panorama of this literature, but it is important to acknowledge some of the main theories and approaches, and to indicate our relationships to these.

Philosophy has extensively treated the subject of humour, exploring the essence of the comic and trying to find a definition for what causes it. One can distinguish three main schools of thought in the field, although new solutions are still being proposed.¹² The first line of thought, stemming from the oldest extant writings about humour by Plato and Aristotle (to whom the comic was a sub-category of the “ugly”), is the one termed the Superiority theory, as it was eventually formulated by Hobbes. According to this theory, “We laugh from feelings of superiority over other people, or over our own former position” (Morreal 1987: 5). The objection many have raised, although the theory seems to work in many instances, is that we do not always react with laughter when we are confronted with our success, or with someone else’s failure. The second theory is the so called Relief theory, which “takes a more physiological approach to laughter, treating it as the venting of excess nervous energy” (Morreal 1987: 6). As exaggerated as this might seem (since it is unlikely that it is always

¹² I am much indebted to the discussion of humour in philosophy in Morreal 1987.

nervous energy that we release when we laugh) Freud (one of the main exponents of this theory) has applied it in ways which I feel are hardly disputable, and I shall draw from his insights on jokes in the next pages.¹³ The third and most discussed theory, is the so-called Incongruity theory, which argues that “what amuses us is some object of perception or thought that clashes with what we would have expected in a particular set of circumstances” (Morreal 1987: 6). Among its main exponents, Kant, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard have held, on various grounds, that the incongruous is the object of laughter, or rather amusement.

Among the philosophical approaches to laughter Bergson’s influential theories are often cited. I sometimes refer in what follows to his definition of humour as being the product of a “lack of elasticity.” More importantly for my thesis, Bergson has the great merit of having brought laughter back into its context: the group. And his definition of laughter as a “social gesture” is most useful for my purposes. As he states:

To understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all we must determine the utility of its function, which is a social one [...] Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social signification (Bergson 1911: 7-8).

Moving away from the discussions about the essence of humour, I take it for granted that the narratives in my corpus were funny for the people, and focus now on why people needed to employ laughter in relation to certain aspects of their life. I base my argument on the fact that “a source does not emit humorous statements unless he expects to achieve some interpersonal purpose by so doing” (Kane, Suls, Tedeschi 1977: 13). The question then arises, as the authors say, “Why is humour initiated?”, and why on certain matters? For discussion of the uses of laughter in community, I found some studies especially relevant and illuminating, including Chapman 1976, Foot and Chapman 1976, Kane, Suls, Tedeschi 1977, Powell 1977 and Glenn 2003. What these authors have in common is that they view laughter within ongoing lines of interaction. Most useful were also studies about “joking

¹³ The other main exponent of this theory was Spencer (see Morreal 1987).

relationships”, in particular Radcliff-Brown 1940 and Bricker 1980. However, these scholars tend to dwell on “first-hand” mocking acts among people, whereas I am investigating narratives, which are in a sense ‘one step removed.’ Joking relationships proved very useful for analysis of accounts of practical jokes, but where other sorts of narratives were concerned, most of the reasons conventionally given for laughing at the comic actor were no longer applicable when the object of laughter was a narrative about the comic actor. When we laugh at something, that something is a target. When we laugh at a story about the same something, that something is no longer a target, but a means to an end which might have nothing to do with that something, but rather (I argue), serve the purpose of exchanging messages between those who laugh with each other. Laughter is social. We need an ally to laugh at a story about a target. It takes three to laugh at a narrative, while two is enough for laughing at a target, as Freud explains in clear terms (Freud 1960: 144). This means that the laughter elicited by a narrative is an act of communication between an individual-teller and the rest of the community-audience. Laughter directed at a target can stem from many feelings, from sympathy to hatred to derision. But laughter at the story about the same object will stem from needs to confirm various kinds of alliances within the group (Provine 2000). Existing accounts of joking relationships focus on the precise kinds of relationships within which mocking occurs, whereas in my Frassinoro community the narrative right of the corpus was so widely extended as to go beyond precise kin relationships.

More valuable for my purposes were studies of laughter as a feature of daily interaction, regardless of kin-relationships, including Glenn 2003, Provine 2000, Chapman and Foot 1977 and Norrick 1993. For example, Provine made “observations of naturally occurring laughter, describing what laughter is, and where and when we laugh”, and discovers that “speakers laugh more than their audience, that women laugh at [and I would add with] men more than men laugh at women and that laughter has more to do with relationships than with jokes”(Provine 2000: 8).

For laughter in various kinds of relationships, I have drawn on Apte’s study (Apte 1985), which concentrates on ethnological and anthropological aspects of laughter. Most useful was Glenn 2003, a study based on 25 years of research on the sequential organisation of laughter, from a perspective of discursive analysis. Glenn speaks of

affiliative and hostile laughs, and concludes helpfully that laughter ‘accomplishes’ other actions: “The meaning(s) of any particular bit of laughter can only be understood by characterising the actions it accomplishes” (Glenn 2003: 34). He goes on to explain that:

The fundamental question shifts from “Why do people laugh?” to “What are people doing when they laugh?” Emphasis is placed on co-construction of sequences, interactions, understandings and meanings. In such a conception we move away from the simple assumption that laughter follows humour, to a mutual constitution model that suggests that the occurrence of laughter marks its referent (usually retrospectively) as laughable – and potentially, as humorous. Funniness becomes understood not as an inherent property of a message, or the internal state of a social being, but rather as a jointly negotiated communicative accomplishment. In summarising and presenting the research that follows I minimise claims about psychological or emotional states of persons laughing. Rather, my focus remains on what people display to each other and accomplish in and through their laughter. (Glenn 2003:33).

Glenn is also illuminating on the dynamics of “*laughter at*” and “*laughter with*” (Glenn 2003: 112-121). This is highly significant for my work, since I have to talk about a situation in which the two sorts occur at the same time, achieving different results. “Laughter at” implies reinforcement of social structures, according to Chapman and Foot, Glenn, Powell, Fine, Bricker and many others. On that basis I am able to make the further assumption that “*laughter at*” was a very conservative weapon in the village. Here I have found the theories of Menache and Horowitz about the use of humour in the Christian Church of the Middle Ages most useful. They see humour as a shield “contre la sensation de vertige devant une accélération incontrôlable de l’histoire¹⁴” (Horowitz Menache 1994: 76). This leads me to look at my corpus of humorous narratives as an expression of a need for laughter as a means to social cohesion and affirmation, in a period when the village was changing and the

¹⁴ ...against the dizzying sensation caused by an uncontrollable acceleration of history. (My translation).

people were torn between the need to adapt and the need to reaffirm traditional communal values.

But as people *laugh at*, and by doing so reinforce roles, so they also *laugh with* each other – often laughing with the butt too, if he is telling a self-disparaging narrative – in this case bringing about a sense of community and solidarity.

While my approach insists on the communal side of communication and narrative, I must equally keep the individual and his creative role in sight. Although I argue, following Bernstein, that language was used in my Frassinoro community in ways that subordinated the individual to a collective self which determined the roles he should play, this does not mean that he did not think spontaneously and as an individual. In fact, the opposite is true; for much of my analysis looks into how the individual creator of narratives uses the narrative to express his thought, in contradiction to pre-set status roles. However, I also argue that he does so within certain expressive and narrative constraints, whereby he ends up ‘rebell[ing]’ only within the narrative frames carrying the concepts he wishes to challenge. This is because narratives, in order to be accepted have to be of a certain kind, of a genre that is perceived as “storyable”, where storyability means “what gets told as a story” (Shuman 1983: 54). By doing so, the individual may end up telling narratives that reinforce conservative concepts and models, as I argue in Chapter 5.

The question of attempted self-definition through narratives is fundamental when dealing with self-humour in the village. I see these narratives as attempts to define oneself while remaining within the group. As Cohen observes:

Groups have to struggle against their own contradictions, which lie precisely in the fact that they are composed of individuals, self-conscious individuals, whose differences from each other have to be resolved and reconciled to a degree which allows the group to be viable and to cohere (Cohen 1994: 10)

The individual in my corpus is often the object of mockery and has been singled out for some reason. For understanding the dynamics of creating outcasts and dealing with them within the society, I was helped once again by scholarship focused on the Middle Ages. I refer not so much to studies of the Fool, for he is more of a literary

figure, and since most of the ‘fools’ in the stories in my corpus were not commentators on the world around them, but merely trying to cope with the society in which they lived. Such a fool is hardly the one who subverts, he simply works with the stigma he has been given.

It is more promising from my point of view to look at a more general figure than the fool, namely the ‘stigmatised’ (as defined by Goffman 1963) or the “outcast”, as defined by Le Goff. Illuminating, for my understanding of the relationship between the ‘outcast’ and society has been Le Goff’s contention that the outcast is socially constructed in order to validate us by excluding him. He is the object onto whom we project the faults we fear (Le Goff 1965; cf. also Goffman 1963 in a more contemporary context).

I have also found certain studies of ethnic humour useful for my purposes (e.g. Lowe 1986 and Davies 1998, 1982). Although there were no examples of ethnic humour in Frassinoro, some perceptions contained in these studies can be transferred to an ‘individual vs. community’ situation. Christie Davies says of ethnic jokes that people laugh at “what appears to them to be a slightly strange version of themselves; almost as if they were to see themselves in a distorting mirror at a fair-ground” (Davies 1998: 1). Davies suggests elsewhere that we project onto these people our fears of failure and the faults we ourselves possess (Davies 1982: 390). I shall show that this lens can be applied, with a few corrections, to the Frassinoro authors and audience.

1.5 Notes on Transcription.

In the English translations of the texts which I report in this work I have tried to reproduce the speech of the people as much as possible. For this reason I have not corrected the changing tenses and subjects during the narration. I have not attempted to find more proper words where the ones used by them could seem slightly inappropriate.

In the attempt to give a feel of the performance, I have decided to use italics for what was told in the dialect¹⁵ in the narratives and to leave the standard Italian in

¹⁵ See Appendix 2 for notes on the system used to transcribe the dialect in the texts.

normal print. As a result, when discussing the stories in the corpus in Chapter 5, I use bold in place of italics for emphasis. In the rest of this work, I use italics for emphasis and for non-English words in general, regardless of whether they are in the standard language or in the dialect.

Because the stories in the corpus were collected in group interviews or from couples, there were often at least two people speaking at once. In the English texts, I use { } to report these comments uttered during the narration, so as to indicate that the teller and the audience were speaking at the same time, that the comments might not have been heard by the main teller, and, as a result, that we must not expect his speech to be influenced by comments between these brackets. However, I start a new line and report a change of teller when someone in the audience says something that causes the teller to stop talking and listen for a moment.

In general, I use { } for everything that comes from the audience, such as ‘general laughs’.

I use ‘ha, ha, ha’ only to indicate when the main teller is laughing.

I use [] for my comments and clarifications in the texts.

Finally, I always identify the main tellers, and myself, with initials of the first name and give the whole name in the case of secondary interlocutors.

Chapter 2

Towards a More Concrete Kind of Storytelling

2.1 The restricted code.

As I said in the introduction I consider Frassinoro a society based on a restricted code, because of the set of common assumptions the people could rely upon when communicating among themselves and because of the “dependence on context”, and on the “taking of pre-established meanings and values for granted” (Hymes 1996).

According to Bernstein:

A restricted code will arise where the form of social relation is based on closely shared identifications, upon an extensive range of shared expectations, upon a range of common assumptions. Thus a restricted code emerges where the culture or sub-culture raises the ‘we’ above the ‘I’ (Bernstein 1971:146).

An elaborated code will arise wherever the culture or sub-culture emphasizes the ‘I’ over the ‘we’. It will arise wherever the intent of the other person cannot be taken for granted. In as much as the intent of the other person cannot be taken for granted, then speakers are forced to elaborate their meanings and make them both explicit and specific (Bernstein: 1971:147).

That Frassinoro placed great emphasis on the “we” has been said before in other terms. What is interesting is that Bernstein links the existence of a sense of community with patterns of speech codes, and argues that children learn to relate themselves to a group while they learn their speech, because of the way in which concepts are communicated to them:

As the child learns his speech, or, in the terms I shall use here, learns specific codes which regulate his verbal acts, he learns the requirements of his social structure. The experience of the child is transformed by the learning generated by his own, apparently, voluntary acts of speech. The social structure becomes, in this way, the sub-stratum of the child's experience essentially through the manifold consequence of the linguistic process. From this point of view, every time the child speaks or listens, the social structure is reinforced in him and his social identity is shaped. The social structure becomes the child's psychological reality through the shaping of his acts of speech (Bernstein 1971: 144).

If the appeals are status-oriented then the behaviour of the child is referred to some general or local rule which constrains conduct, 'shouldn't you clean your teeth'[...] (Bernstein 1964: 60).

The rhetorical question reminds the child that he should clean his teeth because of a pre-existing rule. Such ways of formulating questions make for the fact that, as he learns his speech, he is also learning the requirements of the group to which he is associated. Bernstein goes on to explain that:

Status appeals may also relate the child's behaviour the rules which regulate his conduct with reference to age, sex or age relationship, e.g. 'Little boys don't play with dolls', 'you should be able to stop that by now'...

[...]

The effect of these appeals is to transmit the culture or local culture in such a way as to increase the similarity of the regulated with others of his group (Bernstein 1964: 60).¹⁶

This last point is most important, I feel. It implies that through language the child was made aware of his status, thus developing from the beginning the idea of being part of a structure in which there were people who were similar to him and in the same situation. The sense of group and of hierarchy was therefore communicated through small features of speech, which in time made for the perception of the self as related to a group.

¹⁶ My Italics.

When in *Homo Narrans*, Niles suggests that storytelling enables people to gain “the ability to create themselves as human beings” (Niles 1999: 3), he further explains his point by referring to a thought of Paul Ricoeur’s, which he summarises in the following terms:

By the end of that work [Time and Narrative] Ricoeur arrives at the conclusion that identity, whether it be of an individual person or of a historical community, is acquired through the mediation of narrative and thus identity is a function of fiction (Niles 1999: 3).

Narratives that serve the purpose of acquiring identity are not just long ones, but can be as short as the remarks mentioned above. Apparently insignificant remarks, such as “You walk exactly like you mother”, will influence how we see ourselves. I mention this, because there was one particular kind of micro-moulding ‘narrative’ in Frassinoro, which consisted of the stereotypes linked with the *casate*. As Giulio Cesare explained, “There is [pride] still now because, for example, each *casata* has something special. For example, how can I say... *Qui di Masar*. *Qui di Masar* have a peculiar thing, they are entertaining [...] Others are “very meticulous”, others have “a way with women” and then there are those with particular physical characteristics that run in the family. Since their very first years, the children were related to one group defined by precise characteristics. And in some respect it is still so, as I could experience. In June 2006, as I was complimenting a school boy in the village for his ability with composing rhymes for the *Maggio* of the Children, he replied by telling me what *casata* he came from, as if that should illuminate me. Only afterwards I learned how strong the belief was in the village that his *casata* had a way with words.

If this created pride, when the stereotype was positive, it also could create stigmas, of every kind, concerning mental and physical characteristics that people thought ran through the family and sometimes caused women to avoid the men in it. The family reputation carried by the names of the *casate* forced people into labels. As Giulio Cesare said:

Say for example, take a young person passing by, you don’t even notice that he does not say hello to you, because you know where he comes from [from what *casata* and family].

Or one who does say hello, all kindly, even then you say “Well, he is of *qui là* [*là* means *down there*, and in this instance it means a non-specified family].

On one hand, this system generated a sort of tolerance, as one was believed to behave in the only way he could, although that might have been a negative one. However, such stereotypes tied the individual to an inescapable model.

Even when the model was positive, in a society such as the one described here, it seems that the individual is always in a synecdoche-like relationship with one of the subsets. He is defined according to his family, his *casata*, his part of the village... : *I am like those before me ergo I am*. He is a unit of a collective identity. Whatever he does, however talented and special, he is not a free bird who benefits from personal glory, he is a part of the whole and confirming genetic, family, group and community patterns: in other words the individual's positive qualities were seen as part of a plan and always in relation to the group, thus working towards ultimately feeding its pride and linking his perception of himself to the group. The more one excelled, in what was typical of his *casata*, the more he fused himself with his *casata* and almost became the *casata*, thus losing his individuality and becoming a ‘type’.¹⁷

Things were explained and made sense of, by inducing people to see their lives as part of a larger project. To reply to children's questions, the parents resorted to a system of codified explanations – from proverbs, and family stereotypes, to tales – thus often replacing full explanations with what was the traditional way of answering certain questions, of explaining certain matters. Those parents had been given the same explanations too.

Verbal communication with the younger generation, as confirmed by my informants, often happened on the level of cryptic, but traditional, explanations, of

¹⁷ Excelling did not mean rising above the others, or being considered of a special kind, it meant making the whole community rise above their misery for a while. What is fundamental is that being entertained by a villager was not like going to the theatre. At the theatre, by appreciating the performance, the audience feeds the ego of one or a few people with whom they bear no relationships. With the villager they share their essence and they participate in his performance, on the grounds of their being made of the same dough. The only difference is that the villager is endowed with a special quality such as a nice voice and they are not, but that is again just an expression of community to which they all belong. At the same time, it is clear from what the people said that the wit and humour of one was a reason for pride on the part of the whole community (see also Ó Madagain 1985).

which Maurizio (46) once gave me a good example. As a young boy, he had found himself exploring his feelings about the Via Crucis. In the middle of a wet and windy day, he glanced around at all the people who were working hard to set up the stations of the Cross through the village, and found himself wondering why they were making such an effort every three years. He put that question to an elderly lady, who was like a grandmother to him and who was also occupied with some hard work. Her reply was swift: "Every leaf falls because God wants it to fall." Maurizio asked no more, but that had not been an explanation for him, and he had to think for years before he came up with his own answer, and the meaning of the proverb eventually made as much sense to him as it had made sense to the lady who had decided to use it. But Giacobbe's generation was raised through proverbs they did not discuss. As he once said: "We used to go on by force of proverbs!" These nuggets of wisdom were automatically accepted and did not require explanation.

The fact that these codified answers were given to everyone worked towards sustaining "solidarity with the group at the cost of verbal signalling of the unique difference of its members" and made the child feel part of a pattern, which he reinforced as he uttered those narratives himself. After all, as Burke wrote, "proverbs are *strategies* for dealing with *situations*. In so far as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them"(Burke 1941: 297). This is true of proverbs and of other narratives too. Suffice it to say that answers often came in the form of illustrative incidents happened to someone who was known by the child, thus reinforcing connections with others and the vision of the child's experience as part of a common category of experience, a "typical and recurrent situation". This avoidance of personalised explanation was confirmed by the people. Alba believed it was due to a lack of time and communication:

Because back then, among parents and children there was a certain, how can I say, also a certain modesty, a certain ...Yes, well one could not have dialogues, and entertain oneself [chatting], because there wasn't time to stay there [sitting in the house] doing many things back then, because one had to work and go!

As a consequence, Alba says:

They used to scare us with everything, because it was the only weapon they had to be able to defend us, to tell us “Be careful”. Because in those days it was not like today, when if the children move just one step they have their parents behind them, because they must go and take them here, they must go and collect them from there. We had to go after the cows, we would leave in the morning at six and come back at ten. And then leave at three and come back at seven. And so our parents could not follow us, and then there was a lot of people, also a lot of young people, up there on the mountains [where they took the cows to graze], after these cows. And so they [the parents] would put these *paure*¹⁸ after us, this scruple, so that for no reason we would have gone wrong [she laughs].

The narratives Alba refers to are cautionary narratives – such as “if you kiss someone you will become pregnant” – which communicated to them precepts of purity. Strategies for getting men to marry them were communicated by narratives relating the bad consequences of immodest behaviour. Their structure would describe a ‘forbidden action’ and ‘its negative consequence’, as in a standard *exemplum*. These stories were among the few moments of cross-generational communication among women. What is interesting in Alba’s words is that she goes beyond the idea of strategy and points towards an almost physical function of narrative. They “would put these *paure* after us” really gives the impression that the narratives are something that the parent attaches to the child, and which is supposed to stay with the child wherever he/she goes, like a ‘narrative guardian.’ These stories seem to be narratives at slow release, which could last years, until a counter-narrative or an experience comes to disrupt it. When I asked Alba if she thought that these narratives acted as guardians, she replied:

Oh, yes, and then Heaven help! And then back then, we had more respect for our parents. I used to fear my father, who had never hit me, but I used to fear him anyway, and if he just said a thing to me, Heaven help! I was afraid.

¹⁸ See Appendix 1 for definition of this narrative genre.

These narratives substituted the presence of the parent and they also substituted dialogue, as Alba points out, in a society where no attempt to find personalised solutions to problems was contemplated. And far from isolating the child's experience, most of the effectiveness of these narratives was that they tied the child to the experience of someone else of his status, a child like him to which something bad had happened, "a girl like you," "a girl of your age," and so on and so forth. Used daily, from morning to night, to shape characters and behaviours, these stories were reinforced by the fact that every girl was told the same, and that discussion among them would have led to a reinforcement of the taboos and not to a demystification of them.

Nowadays, some elderly women react strongly against these narratives. Because of them, when comparing themselves with the present, they speak of themselves as "ignorant", "dumb", "zulù", "silly", "cretin", and more...I have collected such terms only from women, and never from men. This suggests that women had been kept in a state of ignorance more than the men had.

Contributing to this helpless position of the woman, were the folktales their mothers told them.

Models of behaviour according to gender were found in folktales as well as in more ad hoc little narratives to which Maria refers as "tabù". Tales contribute to transmitting beliefs and most of all models and small strategies of behaviour, as Linda Dégh points out, when she speaks of "feminine values" being "transmitted to the girls" through tales (Dégh 1988: 24).

This was very true in Frassinoro in one particular tale: *Prezzemolina*¹⁹. Stories such as *Prezzemolina* were real manuals of behaviour for women, portraying a girl who had many of the qualities the society wanted to find in a woman. For example, when one of my female informants, to whom I refer as B²⁰, told me the tale of *Prezzemolina* (which her mother used to tell her) her version was very much filled with references to the house duties of the little girl and to how well she could carry them out. This was possible because the tale itself had been used as a means to

¹⁹ A simplified version of ATU 310 (The Maiden in the Tower), but without the motif of the hair shining in the sun (F 555).

²⁰ See Masoni 2007 for an article I wrote on this lady and her sister, whom I call A and B.

perpetuate a certain model of girl, and of woman: the good housewife, the good and obedient girl. At times, tales were suitable for transmitting family principles. B's sister, whom I call A, did not develop the house keeping dimension and instead developed the element of fear in the tale, fear of being abducted, which might have been one of the reasons why their mother told them the story. The tale was very much used for communicating boundaries and behaviour. Most of all, the fear of being abducted was connected with stealing the parsley (*prezzemolo*). Now, in A's family, which was very poor, they were proud of never having asked anyone for anything. In A's mind, the stealing could be associated with the simple need to ask for the help of strangers, of the neighbours, which was in itself a taboo in the family. It is not surprising that the fear associated itself strongly with that moment, as the punishment was felt to be greater in association with the greater fault.

In this tale, one can also detect patterns of behaviour between men and women, whereby the girl is dependent on the help of the man. The helper is a young man, who runs to help Prezzemolina when he hears her crying. This is an admission of weakness on the part of the woman, and the tale teaches that this submission is in itself a key to success, as it wins the help needed to survive. Prezzemolina needs to confirm this dependence, as she does not learn from the help she is given. She cannot learn a method, and she is not given objects that make her independent. Unlike her, male protagonists become independent as soon as they set off for their adventures and they often display a rare confidence. This happens in the tale of the *Riddle*²¹, told by Giacobbe, where the young man is asked: "But, do you know any riddle then?" He says, "Oh, I'll make one up!" And he does put together a very complicated riddle, thus succeeding in marrying the princess who could not guess it. Unlike the male equivalents, the female protagonist does not achieve independence and she seems to have to reiterate her request for help, as every time she is confronted with a new task, she is at a loss. This reiteration ends up providing the structure of the story of Prezzemolina, since the three tasks and the three requests for help were what the women could remember.

It is interesting that, even though the girls from Frassinoro often owned their own money, as servants, they were never left a penny of that money. An older woman of

²¹ A cross between ATU 851 (The Princess Who Cannot Solve the Riddle) and ATU 313 (The Magic Flight). See text in Appendix 2.

the village or the sister would collect it and send it home. The girl was therefore still officially economically dependent. Prezzemolina does not grow up in the story. And it is interesting that she was perceived as being still a little girl, even at the end of the story, also by the people who told it. This is confirmed by the fact that Olga's version of the story tells of the prince who takes Prezzemolina back to her parents, after having decided to marry her and says:

"Do not let this one [Prezzemolina] marry anyone, because I will come back for her when it is time" [...] And Prezzemolina says, "Yes, yes, I will wait for you". And indeed the years went by, she spent until her twentieth year of age in her parents' home [...] And then the time arrived, when the prince went to collect her and with all his carriage and the horses.

It was Olga's mother who used to tell her this story, a much longer and more complicated version than the one told by the sisters. This ending is possibly an addition she had made, to make the final wedding more plausible than in the other versions where it really feels as though Prezzemolina marries at the age of six or so.

Another element, which is retained in Olga's version, but not in the versions of the sisters, is the belief that the fault of the parents will fall on their children. The sisters turned Prezzemolina's tribulation into something she undergoes because of her love and respect for her mother and do not speak of fault, but of "help" due to the mother. Their Prezzemolina does not carry the sign of this fault as Olga's does: "This Prezzemolina was healthy, she grew well, but she had a sprig of parsley here [on the forehead], that grew with her hair [...]. The more she cut it, the more it grew." The fault, represented by the sprig of parsley disappears only after Prezzemolina's wedding. The sense of fault is there, and this belief was not totally abandoned in the village, as I could still gather from one female informant who somehow pointed towards a connection, almost a destiny, between the "evil" actions of a woman in the village and her children's suffering. If models of behaviour in folktales were mostly for women, however, the hero tales of the Arabian Nights did portray a man who could be a model for the boys. The hero in them travelled abroad, often in exotic places, just as the men of Frassinoro did. He was a wandering hero: going away from home to find one's fortune was a common thing in those days. The tale of *Buona*

Fortuna ²² (Lit. Good Luck), where the boy goes to look for 'Good Luck' and finds it, thus saving his entire family, was a tale Giacobbe could only briefly summarise, but which was among the ones the Patriarca would tell more often. Most of the folktales with male protagonists in Frassinoro were from the Arabian Nights. The model of man proposed in the tales I could hear from Giacobbe was always the same: the silly/poor/younger boy who turned into a winner. Giacobbe once remarked about these stories, as he was beginning one where the boy was considered by his mother a bit strange: "Because, in reality, in life, *in life*, intelligence is a bit on the border with insanity." This boy, as opposed to the girl, turns into a winner thanks to his intellect. In the Riddle, he wins because of his wit and cleverness in putting together the right riddle, in the tale of *Buona Fortuna* he wins because he can cheat the magician. Interestingly, this cleverness is often verbal; in the hero's ability to speak the right words, say the right thing at the right moment. As mentioned before, the quality of wit and clever speech was something the men in Frassinoro were very proud of. Also skill in rhetoric, rhyming and riddle making was highly regarded in the village. Those who could speak well and easily were admired and thought of as points of reference in the community. Giacobbe himself used to be consulted on matters of various sorts by the villagers. He was sought after for advice, not only by virtue of his recognised wisdom and sense of justice, but also because of his ability to construct arguments: indeed, the two things often coincided. The men who were considered good orators were, as far as I could gather from the interviewees, always avid readers. Though many of them had not been to school, they had nevertheless learned to read and had become readers of all the popular literature, sacred literature (such as lives of the saints) and generally all the books which circulated in those days. For their ability to converse about anything, and to recount fascinating things which no one else knew, these men had the admiration of the people and seemed to play a prominent role in the community. The man who spoke well was also the one who knew more, thus being able to open the people's eyes.

I would not exclude the possibility that the Patriarca and other tellers might have stressed this quality in the heroes, so as to pass on a model which had probably been

²² Giacobbe summarised this international type over many different visits. Unfortunately he could not remember it properly. However, it is a typical tale of three brothers, only one of which is good.

in the village for a long time, that of the witty male who had a way with words and whose strength in difficult situations was in words.

These were messages that stayed with the people, as Giacobbe said “If it is not today, tomorrow the reasoning of your parents will come back to you” [you will be reminded of it when it is useful].

Folktales, which according to Giacobbe were “examples of life,” contained a teaching that was meant to sink in, slowly, like that of the proverb and return to memory, when the situation required. The effectiveness of the teaching was to him comparable to that of the Catholic precepts, and Giacobbe saw in the folktale a grid of behaviour, which coincided with Catholic values and reinforced them:

They are examples that the good one has been rewarded by the old lady, because he helped her, and the other who did not help her, has done wrong, has made a mistake. Therefore they are examples, of good and evil. [...] And tales were born for that purpose.

Communal help, especially to the elderly, was one of the main requirements in Frassinoro. It was one of the values that stemmed from the religious lessons and parents must have trained their children in the interpretation of folktales in religious terms. Religious education started in the home, and was often carried out through little narratives, which tended towards identification. At times, simple scenes of daily life were portrayed in front of their eyes, to make them feel close to Jesus and at one with Him. Situations were also enacted. For example, on Christmas Eve, the children had the task of putting hay in the manger, then they would wait for the cows to get up to see what was in the manger, and finally to watch them sniffing on the hay. This ‘sniffing,’ the children were told, was the “cows warming up the Baby Jesus.” These little enacted-narratives helped the children feel closer to the divinity, by visualising him as a child, just like them. Imagination and visualisation are still essential today to the experience of Faith: science having yet been unable to prove or disprove the existence of the divinity, the only way in which we can access the divine is through a form of imagination, or a cognitive instrument working on a level that is not that of direct experience. The religiosity of the people had its strength in its ability to focus on the human side of the divinity, thus bringing God among them and identifying

with Jesus and Mary as humans. Again this was a means of passing down information and creating meaning for the child by making him feel part of a wider group, at one with others like himself. These enactments, which were very frequent, seem an example of what Bernstein said about the restricted code "which facilitates the ready transformation of feeling into action".

This concrete dimension of communication was reflected also in many proverbs in which the abstract emotions and what would have been an abstract explanation, were translated into practical situations. The proverb "To go to the mill without soiling one's clothes with flour" is an example of this. It means that one cannot expect to perform any action, even the simplest one, without bearing the consequences. But it also means that one cannot get anything without working to gain it. It is nowadays still said to people when they complain about the consequences of an action that brought them some kind of advantage in the first place. It was an image that could easily be understood by the people and which applied to their daily life. Thoughts were expressed by turning them into actions and concrete situations which served as examples. It was a way of communicating by giving people "food for thought," as Dvora (the woman in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's study of parable in context) said of the parables she performed within delicate family situations. Also, these proverbs and narratives which always applied the situation to another person, allowed the speaker to "give an example without directly hitting" the person as Dvora said of her stories, thus enabling the person to "see it clearer, more objectively, without emotions" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1975: 302). And indeed, this is typical of the restricted code where appeals are more status-oriented than person-oriented as in elaborated codes. And not surprisingly, of person-oriented appeals, Bernstein states that control relies on the "manipulation of thought and feeling." This could not really be the case for the children of Giacobbe's generation, who were given a story from which to extract any meaning they could find. This way of growing up was in many ways more empowering than the person-oriented approach; the children were left free to find their own meaning in what they were told.

These habits of communicating meaning and sense by transferring the problem and the situation which seeks to be understood to another setting and onto another



character are extremely important for understanding the narratives the people became creators of and in particular the humorous narratives of the corpus that follows in the next chapter.

I wonder if the Headmaster was picking up on this habit people had of reifying thoughts, of transforming thoughts and feelings into concrete situations, when he was led to think that people of the mountains have an “unconstrained imagination.” As the teacher reports in her diary, the Headmaster told her:

Maestra, I can assure you that the *children of the mountains are more intelligent* than those of the lowlands, because they are healthy children. These children were born of parents who lead a simple and frugal life and not ruined by over drinking and other pleasures which unfortunately leave in the individual hereditary sicknesses.

Up here there is a lot of poetry. *The people of the mountains have an unconstrained imagination*²³. Do cultivate the imagination of these children and use it effectively, to improve your teaching²⁴.

2.2 Changing tastes.

While for some time I thought tales had been forgotten because the village had not had a good storyteller after the Patriarca, it became obvious that if no one had taken up his role it was because the adults had lost their interest in the *folia*. The people confirmed that idea, even Giacobbe, who was my main source of tales, said he was not interested in them. The people of his generation had become avid readers of popular novels and of literature of adventure, such as Emilio Salgari's, who was the Italian Jules Verne²⁵.

In this section I look at what they liked instead. It is important to stress that all of the people I mention here were among the wittiest people, who appreciated humour. Among them, Mario is considered to have been the wittiest in the village, when he

²³ My Italics.

²⁴ My Italics.

²⁵ All these books became popular in Frassinoro around the late thirties and stayed so until the early forties, when a priest ordered them all to be burned, as some informants told me. Dumas, Eugène Sue, Andrea da Barberino, Carolina Invernizzi, these are some of the authors that were mentioned by the informants: “Oh we used to love those books!” Antonio Gramsci has discussed this phenomenon, wondering why the people identified so much with this form of literature and what the needs were that these novels satisfied (Gramsci 1985).

was a young man. However, when asked about tastes, they all pointed towards tragedy and only Giulio Cesare mentioned the humour. He was indeed a listener to it and not a creator of it, unlike the other three, for whom creating humour was such a daily feature of speech, and such a 'norm for interaction' (Hymes 1996: 118), that it was hardly mentioned among discussions of tastes.

One afternoon, in the middle of a conversation about tales, Giacobbe said:

"I tell *favole*, because you asked me for them. Other than that, I was never interested in them [...] I used to think more of the *Maggio*, than of the *favole*, I was more passionate about the *Maggio* [...] I used to be interested in those stories there, I was interested in the stories of the *cantastorie* [the singer of broadside ballads], I knew all of those songs there.

The *Maggio* mostly presented stories of love and battle, where the hero, a devout Christian, could win thanks to his faith. Giacobbe saw the *Maggio* stories as being very similar to the *fole*:

G. Yes, but because they are two parallel things, right? Also in] the *Maggio*, there are Turks and Christians. Those are battles they do among themselves, but the Christian always wins [...]. The one who is wrong always loses, the villain in the end is always punished. It's like a *favola*, the same.

One main difference between tales on the one hand, and *Maggio* and novels on the other, was that the latter abounded in dramatic displays of feelings with which the audience could feel involved.

Maria said something very important during the discussion about *Maggio* and tales, as we were talking about the moral of tales. She said that in the *Maggio* "there is the tragedy, not the moral, but the tragedy".

This underlines the fact that the *Maggio*, unlike a folktale, was not an example of conduct, but a way of experiencing feelings through the feelings of others who had been through similar struggles. More than its values then, the people benefited from the tragedy, from the mistakes, the sorrows, the struggling. The tale taught one how to act, while the novel and the *Maggio* helped you to live the life you had.

Giacobbe once observed about *Les Misérables*, by Hugo:

L. Well, why then did you like the *Miserabili* and all those books, even if they made you suffer?

G. Well for example, also all those miseries which were told in the *Miserabili*...those were books that made you cry, made you feel bad, but by reading it we felt content with what we had, even if we had very little.

L. I see.

G. Did you understand? Because today people have everything, but one day they were poor, they had nothing. Suffice it to say that in Frassinoro we did not even have a road. To go to Sassuolo to buy some wheat, one had to go on foot, for example, to buy sugar [too]. One had to go on foot. And so people managed with what they had. And so, by reading those books, those books and those stories, they made life less difficult. I do not know if I have made you aware? Have you understood?

When books such as the *Les Misérables* appeared in Frassinoro (which happened only in the early 1920s), they displayed situations that were still far removed from the village, and in a totally different setting (just like some of the traditional tales), but which contained a higher level of verisimilitude. They were in a relationship of similitude with the life of the people of Frassinoro. They were in this sense proverbial. If Giacobbe could receive so much help from those books, it was because he felt they applied to his life of struggle. And because he could share the struggle with other people. Giacobbe's favourite book was "*Il Re della Montagna*" (1895), 'The King of the Mountain' (by Emilio Salgari) from which he even derived a *Maggio* script. During his teenage years, forced to lie in bed by a kidney disease which only just failed to kill him, he was reading this book in which the young hero, who had lived on a mountain all his life, was dreaming of escape and shouting "I want to see the world!" And Giacobbe was dreaming with him.

This need for verisimilitude pushed also Ariosto away from tales: "I did not use to pay attention to them [the Patriarca's tales], I did not learn them, if you are not interested in something, you do not remember it". He was instead interested in stories of bandits. Those stories were set in the area around Frassinoro, or in the area of Sardinia where he used to work. They were about men who had lived an adventurous life in the mountains he knew well, filled with place-names and with areas he could

visualise. Some of these stories he found in books, others were told to him, for example by the Patriarca, who was a flexible teller and used to entertain the young workers in Sardinia with stories about the bandits in the area.

Mario too had a need for things that he felt were true, for “stories of life”: “When we were fifteen we did not listen to tales anymore”. Instead he listened to broadside ballads, which he took as news reports, like everyone else. The stories of the *Cantastorie* were called, by the *cantastorie* themselves, ‘fatti’. *Fatti* meant things that really happened. The *fatti* of the *cantastorie* often relied on a basis of struggle and sorrowful life events. Among these stories there was one which narrated a very similar episode to that of the popular poem of the *Pia de Tolomei*, a piece from Dante’s *Divina Commedia*, which entered oral literature and was turned into a slightly different story, where Pia is no longer guilty. Mario, who had always been fond of the poem, took the broadside ballad to be a more recent example of a similar situation. Mario tells parts of the popular poem, which he knows by heart, and at times slips into the more modern broadside ballad. His point of view, when telling them, is very much that of the man, the tormented man. Both stories deal with a man who has to leave home for a long time, due to a war, and is forced to leave his wife and children, a category of experience Mario could relate to. On his return home, he discovers he has supposedly been betrayed by his wife and kills her and his son. It is a tragedy which still moves one to tears, and broadsides were full of similar tragic events.

Moving even further away from tales was Giulio Cesare:

We, we didn’t like those *fole* there, we liked other things, but more real. But funny, because my generation has suffered the effects of the War, because during the time of the partisans and so on, I remember well, everything. And so, we maybe needed to hear things that were more fun, but not things, lies, because those *fole* there were lies, well told maybe and everything, but with wizards and witches and everything. Things that were more real but fun, real, but fun.

For example, I don’t know, the Americans, you know the Americans are very sparkling and entertaining, very, they use self-criticism, yes, self...how can I say?

L. Yes, self- irony...

G. Yes, self-irony, and so we wanted to hear that kind of things, not things, neither too serious – because too serious

was not good, because we had been through things that were quite, yes, quite traumatic let's say, because when they bombarded, when, we were here. Therefore they [the Germans] passed, with the partisans [carrying them as prisoners or as dead bodies], we went to pick up the bullet cases when there were some battles. We went, I don't know, to see the dead, 'cause here some people had been killed, and we went to see the dead because they had to leave them there, it was the Germans who killed them. We used to go and look, "they have shot him here", "they have shot him there", one could see the holes of the bullets. And so we needed to be more...[we needed] things, but not lies, but amusing things, but truer, let's say, but amusing, not sad that's it!
(Giulio Cesare 71 years old)

"Reali" and "divertenti" (lit. amusing) were the new choices then, as opposed to tales, which were filled with impossible things. "Reale" was stories of politics, of struggle, of the misery of life, of life in the mines and life as emigrants. Then the other preference was for the "divertenti", the comic. And Giulio Cesare was speaking of the very stories of my informants, which he had heard and liked.

There has been a real rejection of the *folia* genre, also because most people thought of tales as 'impossible things' and lies²⁶, and Giacobbe had confirmed this. I once asked him what was needed in order to have a folktale:

G. Impossible things!

Maria. Bravo.

L. So what are these things more or less?

G. That I fly! That the wolf dies and [someone] jumps out [of his stomach].

Maria. Then that with a wind you blow down a little hut. It isn't possible...

G. ...to blow down a hut with a fart²⁷.

²⁶ The only exception was Giacobbe, who went beyond the "impossible things," which he felt were additions and embellishments, to find the core of the tale, which he believed was ultimately a self-sufficient, thoroughly grounded moral framework for human life:

"Magic comes because Cinderella is good. Magic, they use it, but the one who listens must understand that magic has nothing to do with it. It's all about human feelings, magic is there to give value to [*valorizzare*] this goodness. Magic is the goodness of the person, it is not a wizard, it is the goodness of the person that reacts [meaning causes a reaction in the hero]. Magic does not exist, but goodness exists, and badness exists!"

²⁷ This is how the wolf knocks down the houses of the little geese in *The Three little Geese*, a version of ATU 124 (Blowing the House in) collected in the village.

All the genres above, from novels to broadside ballads, point towards a more concrete choice, of verisimilar situations.

As I put Giacobbe's words and Giulio Cesare's together, it became obvious that changes in taste could not have been affected only by age. They were indeed a result of the time they found themselves living in. The War, as Giulio Cesare pointed out, was certainly a reason for all this, but there were other reasons too, among which I believe emigration was fundamental, for the changes it brought. From what I could see in the official records, the rates of emigration grew exponentially when my informants were in their twenties. The cities and Algeria were very different places. Even those who went to Sardinia had to pass through Livorno and Pisa to catch the ferry; they went to the cinema there, they went to visit relatives that had moved to the city. Changed times and buses (although initially very infrequent) had made for a great increase in mobility and people met "the outsider" more and more. These conditions made a fundamental contribution to the shaping of the village's character, by influencing many other aspects of the life of the population. The girls, as Sister Costanza remarked, acquired more refined manners and habits, which "they tried to apply to their world [Frassinoro]". The women, as well as some men who had been to the States, were prone to changes. As a result, the village was less culturally stable than the Frassinoro of my informants' parents' generation.

In a changed reality, it is understandable that the old narratives, like folktales, were not suitable for making sense of the present, and people needed to find new sources from which to learn how to live and draw new models, as opposed to the old ones which did not seem to provide immediate help in the new world.

Not everyone saw deep down into tales like Giacobbe did, finding teachings for life in them. As Burke wrote:

The situations and strategies framed in Aesop's fables, for instance, apply to human relations now just as fully as they applied in ancient Greece. They are, like philosophy, sufficiently "generalised" to extend far beyond the particular combination of events named by them in any one instance. They name an "essence." Or, as Korzybski might say, they are on a "high level of abstraction." One doesn't usually think

of them as “abstract,” since they are usually so concrete in their stylistic expression. But they invariably aim to discern the “general behind the particular” (Burke 1941: 301).

However, it is exactly this level of abstraction that seemed to be the obstacle to the appreciation of tales as my informants grew up. Most people needed to find their teachings in something that seemed closer to their lives. The impression is that moving towards a more concrete genre meant overcoming the metaphor of tales, shortening the road of interpretation until symbol and object coincided. The five-year-old girl in *Prezzemolina*, for example, who was the prisoner of a witch who had turned her into a slave-servant, could by metaphor bring to mind the young Frassinorese having to abandon her home at the age of thirteen to go and work for a cruel mistress in Florence. But this was not the case for the people I interviewed. *Prezzemolina* was a little girl and therefore the women who told me the story maintained that they could identify with her only when they were children. One of them denied seeing patterns in common with her life in Florence, although her way of telling the tale might prove the opposite. However, this is what she declared. She used to visualise *Prezzemolina* as herself as a child. She was then afraid of being given away because there was not enough food in the house for all her brothers, getting lost in the woods, being kidnapped by an old lady or by a gipsy. But she stopped thinking of *Prezzemolina* when she reached Florence. From that point onwards, the girls were accompanied by easier identifications: *Prezzemolina* was not useful anymore. Instead, there were for example Carolina Invernizio's²⁸ novels, which shortened the space of interpretation and displayed a higher level of mimesis, so much so that they told of girls who were working in a city as servants or seamstresses and verbalised their fears and struggles in much clearer terms²⁹. In many ways the themes of the tale were being inserted in the contemporary society and allowed to adapt themselves to the present, but with one substantial lack, novels did not contain magic. Although fictional, they were credible.

²⁸ Carolina Invernizio was the most popular Italian author of such popular literature. She was the Italian equivalent of the Gothic ladies of the English scene.

²⁹ As Eco pointed out, Carolina Invernizio was the first to write about women and for women and to give a voice to working women, who had never been portrayed before (Eco; Federzoni; Pezzini, Pozzato 1979:5).

This concrete and credible element was a valuable source of hope. It made for the fact that the reader could reasonably believe in the possibility of the happy ending after the tragedy, as no physically impossible elements were involved in its achievement. Novels often had a parallel to magic however, a supernatural element, but it was a credible one; it was the help of God. The *Maggio* had been counting on that element for a long time, to establish a link with its audience. Faith as a means towards happiness was within the teachings received as children. People in the church were taught it was the only way out from the misery of life. People believed in miracles, but they did not believe in magic. In the novels, praying to God, as the *allo-motif* of magic, is a means which was just as available to the poor as it was to the rich, possibly even more to the poor, given the words that refer to the privileges of the poor in the kingdom of God. By indirectly making prayer into a means of happiness, the popular authors were also giving the girls of the village an important aspect in common with the rich city girls, their Faith.

Cesare Pavese, speaks of this uniting power of popular novels, in his novel *The Moon and the Bonfire* (*La Luna e i Falò* 1950). It is written from the point of view of the protagonist who comes back to his village in the North of Italy, after having spent years in America. Once back, he remembers his life in the village. He tells of books he read, the very ones Giacobbe speaks of. This is the account of an intellectual who, being a translator as well, had read more than one could possibly imagine, was in contact with the famous folklorist De Martino, and could see through narratives as well as he could write them. One of the most sensitive writers Italy ever had, it is meaningful that he dedicated many lines to what follows:

The winter before, Emilia had given me a loan of Irene's novels which a girl from Canelli lent to them [...] And I read those novels beside the fire to learn something. They told of girls who had guardians and aunts and enemies who kept them shut up in beautiful houses with gardens where there were maids who carried letters and administered poison and stole wills. Then a handsome man would arrive, who kissed them, a man on horseback he was, and at night the girl would feel she was suffocating and go out into the garden, and they would carry her off, and she would awake the next morning in a woodcutter's hut where a handsome man would come to rescue her. Or else the story would start with a boy running

wild in the woods, and he was the natural son of the owner of a castle where all sorts of crimes and poisonings took place, and the boy was accused and put in prison, but then a white-haired priest would save him and marry him to the heiress of another castle. I realised I had known those stories for a long time, for Virginia had told them to Giulia and me in Gaminella – they were the story of Sleeping Beauty with the golden hair, who was sound asleep in a wood and a hunter awoke her with a kiss; and the story of the [W]izard with the seven heads who, whenever he had won a maiden's love, became a handsome man, the son of a king.

I liked these novels, but could Irene and Silvia, who were ladies and had never known Virgilia or cleaned out the stable, really like them too? I realised that Nuto was quite right when he said that to live in a hovel or in a palace was one and the same thing, that blood is the same colour everywhere, and that everybody wants to be rich and in love and make their fortune (Pavese 2002: 166-167).

Two important elements come out of this. First of all, it is clear that Pavese implies that the novel was, however similar to the tale, a progression, a further step in entertainment, which was indeed more suitable to the protagonist's age. Those novels had something in them that made them readable. He does not hint at purist feelings of wanting to go back to the oral origin of those stories. His parallelism with tales is not to say that there was nothing new in novels, but it was meant to pre-announce what he would say later. Comparing the novel to the tales heard in the stable was a way of ideally opening up the stable into the rest of the world and of letting the rest of the world into the stable. The help Giacobbe got from novels was not just due to the novel itself, but also to the fact that the novel was uniting him to many people around Italy who had read it too. The *veglia* was only for the Frassinorese and in a context that was mono-class. The experience of reading the novel, however individualistic it could seem, was actually creating bonds for the villager that were important for his life outside Frassinoro (besides, the novel was also becoming a *veglia* story, told in series during winter nights by those who had read it). Novels made the villager feel he was like those outside the village; they broke through borders for a moment.

It is interesting that unity and communion with the other, with the rich, with the different, happen on the level of tragedy, on the level of the lack of fortune, on the

level of hopes for the future. It makes the individual feel one with the rest of human kind and at the same time more aware of himself as an individual, as he is no longer tied to the group only, but to 'men', to 'women'. I believe that tragedy was one way in which people made a bridge towards the outside, in the attempt to find common ground. It was an attempt to reach towards an elaborated code, and it is interesting that novels carried out the action of uniting also by focussing more on the individual's feelings and describing them to the people.

I believe that this push to reach out and find common ground was one of the possible reactions to the changes of those years, to the exposure to other ways of thinking and other ways of speech. To interact with others they had to abandon village standards and start from the beginning, on their own grounds. This loneliness, reflected also in the experience of reading, augmented the need people had of feeling connected. And so, as Pavese continues:

On those evenings, coming back beneath the acacias from Bianchetta's house, I was happy; I whistled to myself and thought no more of jumping on to the train (Pavese 2002: 167).

Indeed he did not need to escape, because he was already one with the whole.

This feeling of communion with the world, however, could be brief, and the harshness of life in service and outside the village could make for opposite drives too – not ones that reached out, but ones which fenced out the rest of the world, and which, far from establishing a self that was one with and like the whole, confirmed a self in relation to the group, more and more defined as opposed to the rest (although, as will be seen in Chapter 5, this does not imply a fixed sense of self). This represented a defence against the outside and the changes, and was an expression of the rejection often experienced outside. This response was represented by humorous narratives, which far from being universal were more and more specialised and filled with references to the village that only the people could understand. This was indeed the genre of exclusively original production; it could not be drawn from books or broadsides, because it had to be tailored to the people, tending towards a specialisation of the restricted code and a definition of the self as part of a group and

as opposed to those who were not part of it. They therefore acted towards sustaining a feeling of conservatism.

For those who perceived the outside as hostile, for the men who were at the *Macchia* and the girls who were struggling in the city, the thought of coming back provided strength. As the young people say today, “those who go to Modena to school see what it’s like down there and decide to come back here.” The thought of the village provided strength for the times spent away from it:

There was a girl, from Frassinoro, who was in service in Pisa. When her mistress commanded her, she said “Assunta”, because her name was Assunta, “Assunta you must tidy up, you must tidy up the living room, you must tidy up....., Assunta!” And she, in a low voice, would say, in her dialect “Yes, yes, madam, in May I will go home anyway.” Because that was what encouraged her, because she said “Yes, yes”, because they had to say “yes, yes”, they were in service, “Yes, yes, madam, but in May I’ll go home.”

What was special about the conditions of the people in Frassinoro, was that, even if for months they struggled under *padrone*, when they came back to the village they were the absolute owners of themselves. This was a special condition, which created pride and sustained the people when working for others. As Giulio Cesare points out, when they came back to Frassinoro “they were all kings, because we all had our piece of land and no one could dare touch it.” The *padroni* were left outside, the people were not in a constant dependence on one big *padrone*, they had a break from the condition of subjugated people. Dino said that those who emigrated for longer periods had a particularly strong attachment to the village and its institutions and, from what I understood, they were often as conservative as the ones who had never left, often even more so. This need to keep the village free from outside changes was reflected in a need for equality, as only that could keep changes out. And equality was very much identified with the common poverty and struggle. It is understood in little remarks the people often repeat, such as their frequent laughing remark about the fact that they used to smell of cows all the time, after which they always add: “but it did not matter, because everyone else smelt the same”, which meant that the effect was annulled. The important thing was to be equal, so as to keep the “contact” among each other. As Martino said:

Most families were struggling, because we did not have all the abundance we have today, in those days we experienced real misery. In those days there was a *system*, but there was a *contact* among families, because if one needed some bread he would go and borrow it, or an onion, it did not matter what. In other words there was always a *contact*!

Bringing certain kinds of changes in the society, involved breaking the “contact”. Without going as far as talking about ‘limited good’ (Foster 1945; Lyle 1990), this is however a useful idea for understanding how envy did provide a threat that pushed people towards maintaining parity, both economically and as far as one’s role was concerned.

Here is what Father Aldo, who was born in Frassinoro and left it in his teens to become a missionary friar, said to Marco Piacentini, during one of his visits to the village:

It would be wrong to say that in those days everything was beautiful, it would be wrong to say that even then there were no unfriendly behaviours, envy and even hatred, because there were bad things even back then. It would be wrong to say it was an ideal world and even more wrong it would be to want to go back to that world. Even if it was a world where everything was framed inside a project, as we would say today, where everything had a precise function, a purpose, a reason and well determined development, which had practically been like that for centuries and centuries, it is a world which will not exist any more, because the last forty or fifty years have made it disappear, with violence maybe, but the fact is that it does not exist any longer.

But the one thing of those days, which should be remembered and found again, certainly upon other premises, is the sense of community, of collectivity, of solidarity (Piacentini 1998: 213).

Father Aldo’s words are extremely illuminating. His description of a “world where everything was framed inside a project” and “where everything had a precise function, a purpose, a reason and well determined development” conveys the sense of a community which depended on its rules and values as foundations for its

survival and preservation. This need to make sense of reality by linking it to patterns, models and values that had been approved by past generations – of making sense of the present by seeing patterns of the past in it – potentially influenced the way in which politics was perceived in the village.

Some people did not want to have anything to do with politics in general, regardless of the party. Many people did not want any politics in the house, as it was believed to bring division and trouble. This attitude towards politics was probably influenced by the need to have some background knowledge of things and people. Politics had no history in the village, it had never entered the village before Fascism came. Only then did people take sides.

As Dino put it, when we spoke of politics, “our party was the Badia”. The Badia was the symbol of the immobile village that never changed, as that was the place where they felt the connection with all those who had prayed there before them. Father Aldo’s father paid his visit to the Madonna, inside the Badia and, on this occasion he said to his son: “I find, here in this church, all my elders who, before leaving, prayed here as I am doing now; here were buried all my dead...” And Father Aldo comments: “There was really an identification with the ancestors, with the tradition and with its symbols, which had been passed on from generation to generation, and had remained practically unvaried through the centuries” (Piacentini 1998: 205).

Those unchanged symbols created a reassuring feeling and some people say that they were attached to the very “stones” of the Badia. The past and the ancestors created pride and helped identification with a model of Frassinorese, thus allowing people to understand themselves by linking themselves to their heritage.

But one thing was the pride in the ancestors who had been romanticised and made into heroes in stories passed down within the families, quite another thing was the generation of their parents and grandparents, those who were in the present and could not be looked at through a romanticising lens.

The remote past could be manipulated in such a way as to validate the image of themselves as Frassinoresi which they liked to convey, but the elderly and their parents’ generation were there to project an image of the Frassinorese with which at times they could hardly identify.

Although always maintaining their respect for the elderly, my informants also often referred to their rigidity. Maria once remarked that the village was “bacchettone” (bigoted) and the elderly were “retrogradi” (fossils) by which she meant not developed enough. This feeling of being kept back by the elderly was present in many interviews and so was this reference to their lack of flexibility. “Stiff” was another word, “rigid”. It referred to a rigidity of mind. One female informant, when I asked her if she felt the elderly were paid more respect in the old days, as opposed to how much they are paid now, remarked that for the elderly they had “tolerance let’s say, not so much all that respect.”

The difference between the generation of my informants and that of their parents was substantial, more than what had existed between their parents and their grandparents. Giulio Cesare was most definite in arguing that there were great differences between one generation and the other in the way they related to the world around them:

Because for the elderly, it was really a problem, because they had real diatribes, ...while the young ones, of course the young ones, did not look at things like... The young ones carried in a more easy going way, and indeed one could see the evolving, from the elderly, who were very rigid, to the young ones before us who were more flexible, as for example, I am talking about those ones, like Vittorio, Sconcori, [a man of Giacobbe’s generation] right? And then we arrived, afterwards. There were leaps [between us and the older generation]. There were generations [between us]! And really they were like...they were really divided by a furrow! From one generation to the other, they were really divided. Now it’s not like that anymore.

When I asked him if he thought that the “furrow” among the generations also translated itself into different preferences for narratives, from one generation to another, he agreed:

G. Yes, yes!

L. Therefore when the Patriarca was alive there would be more *fole*...

G. Sure, sure, that's it, you have really hit the centre of the matter. Because now for example, if I tell my sons some extremely funny things – to my sons right, not to my grandsons – well, they don't like them that much, it's not a big deal for them...They do not affect them much at all, it's not a big deal, they do not take it up [telling stories], like I took it up.

M. No, they do not tell it to their children.

G. They do not re-tell it to their children.

M. That's right.

Giulio Cesare is therefore speaking of an organic process of rejecting old elements, by the act not just of not listening with interest, but of avoiding passing stories on, just as my informants had stopped passing *paure* on. This process is obviously continuing. He is not just talking about a natural progression due to growing older, but to different needs imposed by the changing times, the changing world around them. The new generation has other worries – cars, health and more – and therefore they do not find help in repeating their parents' narratives, just as Giacobbe, Giulio Cesare and their generation had had their own new worries. Giulio Cesare is pointing towards a generational change, where the element that is not passed on is destined to die out. As far as these particular three generations are concerned, we are looking at a particular moment in time, the twentieth century, when the differences between one generation and the preceding one are so distinct that one could speak of the end of the "homeostatic organisation." As Goody notes:

What the individual remembers tends to be what is of critical importance in his experience of the main social relationships. In each generation, therefore, the individual memory will mediate the cultural heritage in such a way that its new constituents will adjust to the old by the process of interpretation that Bartlett calls 'rationalizing' or the 'effort after meaning'; and whatever parts of it have ceased to be of contemporary relevance are likely to be eliminated by the process of forgetting.

The social function of memory – and of forgetting – can thus be seen as the final stage of what may be called the homeostatic organization of the cultural tradition in non-literate society (Goody 1967: 30).

The narratives each generation chooses to tell, then, are the ones that are kept as relevant. They were an instrument of the present, which the people felt comfortable with, an instrument that they could handle and use, to express themselves and create sense. The stories could be used to activate other processes of forgetting. In a world that was changing, people were trying to find their own models and to overcome some of the teachings of the past, trying to drop some of the things that were not relevant any more. When asked how people felt, after the War, about the ‘wisdom’ that had been passed on to them by their parents, Alba commented:

We used to give less value to everything [the experiences of the elderly], everything had changed, we needed to *adapt*.

This need to “adapt” is most evident in the stories the new generations constructed by themselves, referring to the reality around them. An example of this need to adapt is found in a particular category of narratives in the village, in addition to the humorous ones.

I am concentrating on humorous narratives, but it is worth mentioning, in order to give a complete idea of how the original creation of narratives was a means of designing the new Frassinoresity, that some old elements were rejected through the telling of old stories in a new way, as in the case of the *paure* which were worked into what I call, following Glassie’s definition, “tales of disconfirmation” (Glassie 1982: 68). As will be seen in chapter 5, people used humour to create narratives that counteracted *paure*, but here I would like to speak briefly of a concrete approach to the deconstruction of transmitted fears. Most *paure* were along the same lines. They were about encounters in places where, according to the village belief, “one could hear things” (*a s ghe ved*) , or “one could see things” (*a s ghe sent*). Most of them were about men who went “a morosa” (to visit the beloved).

As Martino commented:

In those days we had pastimes, as when they used to talk about *paure*. Also those were a way of passing the time. Eh, the *paure* [laugh] they were all fantasy.

L. Yes?

M. Yes, the *paure* were all fantasy, because we have discovered that...I mean they used to say, for example, “in

this or that place one can hear a person calling”, I don’t know, but all stuff of fantasy.

L. How did you discover then that they were fantasy?

M. Well I even passed from the time when these things were believed, to the time when these things were not believed any longer, but it disappeared like that, without...

In some instances men of my informant’s parents’ generations had already started taking a direct approach to the deconstruction of these narratives, with the intent to “disbelieve” themselves, as Anita put it when telling a story about her father:

And so he went on walking, until he tripped and he felt his scarf being pulled and tied around his neck. He, all scared, says, “This must be the devil, it must be the devil,” and all scared he comes back home where my grandmother was. “Oh mother, I have seen the devil.” “But what have you seen?” He says, “Tomorrow morning, I must go back to check that point, because I want to disbelieve myself!” And so that was good. He goes back there, and he finds the scarf, attached to a bush. And the story ended there.

Anita’s father did what Glassie’s informant described at the end of a similar tale: “That is what I found out,” he said, “when I investigated” (Glassie 1982: 69). People investigated, went back to find concrete explanations. As Glassie continues, “discussion of the other world is restricted by rules of evidence. Good evidence comes from reliable sources. It can be gathered by one’s senses or received from others, but that other is never a vague friend of a friend” (Glassie 1982: 69).

These men’s sons continued on this line of ‘investigation’, but more often they took a step forward and distanced themselves from their parents by telling stories based on what Dégh defines as “pseudo-scientific explanations” (Dégh; Vázsonyi 1971: 297), thus eliminating any trace of the supernatural and establishing themselves as the modern generation. One example is the fact narrated by Sister Costanza and confirmed by many other people:

[...] they used to say that there, towards the cemetery, you could see flames [coming from the ground]. Also this can happen, and they discovered afterwards that [underground] gases in the summer time can light up, like that.

Even if the result was still legendary, so much so that Dégh calls the resulting narratives “negative legends”, what mattered was that to the people they were not legends any longer, as opposed to the *paure* which they did perceive as legends, and as fictional accounts. Even if the “pseudo-scientific explanations” can be seen as the product of imagination, to the people those were sound explanations. Imagination was used on a regular basis as a way of making sense of experience, thus acquiring what was seen as added knowledge, an explanation. The people resorted to imagination to provide explanations for natural elements, illness, weather, and more. In a world that was very far from scientific explanations, the realm of the inexplicable was a lot broader and people wove narratives to vent their anxieties. The phenomena for which the people did not have a scientific explanation were of course open to speculation as to their cause: superstitions were to people what the family medical encyclopaedia is to us today, for example. When a villager behaved in ways that were “not normal”, explanations were found such as that “when he was little a tree had fallen on his head and had ruined his brain. And when the blood [went up to his brain], in those moments, he could not understand what he was doing.” At other times, fear was believed to have been the cause of illnesses or death: “she scared him so much that he caught jaundice and died after a few months.”

These stories are still believed by the people today, because they are for them credible and concrete. And they hold on to them, as they have helped them to get rid of fear and of the supernatural.

Many of these realisations and rational explanations were probably influenced by an element of progress, in addition to observation. Electricity, which arrived in the village in 1926, although just in a few places, was certainly an important element. In addition to this, the young people might have done what the internet does for urban legends today: in their travelling they might have told the stories to people who challenged their beliefs, either by giving them reasons to stop believing in them, or by telling them they had heard the same story in a completely different place.

Once deconstructed, the old *paure* were not disposed of, but simply given a different function, as we can assume from what Giulio Cesare says:

Also those *paure* there, I personally, and everyone, we used to say that those were the things the young men told when they went *a morosa*, when they arrived at the home [of the beloved] and the parents were there, and they did not know how to make that hour pass, before the parents go to bed [and the young couple is left alone for a while]. Then they tell those lies there, and maybe they would also make up a few just to talk, because otherwise, can you imagine a young man in his beloved's house, and then they all sit down and, and then they all keep silent? Can you imagine? It is an embarrassing thing, right? And so, to get out of that embarrassment, you would, with a cigarette, while they lit up the cigarette, for example – also there you know, take the match out, take that out, and so the time passed a bit, you could find some remedy for it.

[...] And these they would tell these *paure*, because they were subjects that everyone was interested in, the old ones and the young ones, and the children, who were all there, with the young couple.

By speaking of “interest”, Giulio Cesare points towards a conception of these *paure* as entertainment. Children used to ask for one “Cuntem na *paura*! (Tell me a *paura*!). The genre had become a horror story, a fiction for entertainment. In the new context, the young man could still tell of his courage and could still prove to the beloved's parents that he was in touch with the past and knew of the history of the village, which, in the absence of special historical events, was made up of the stories of the people who were no longer living and of their *paure*. The young man was therefore demonstrating that he was a man of the village with respect for the past. Knowing these stories meant knowing the struggles of those before us, knowing the life of the villagers and, essentially, knowing what life was about. However, he was now demonstrating not only that he was not afraid, since he had made it there despite the dangers of the wood, but most of all that he did not believe in those fears, as he was a modern man.

Legends were just kept in contexts where they could facilitate cross-generational communication. They were not a genre that got exchanged among equals, or peers. But the tales of disconfirmation were hardly ever exchanged either. Although it was important to increase their number, thus rejecting the fear imposed by the old

generation, one telling was enough. Because of their character of 'evidence', they were more in the realm of information than in that of stories, which were told and retold³⁰.

All this is in keeping with what Goody says about language. As Goody explains his argument further, his words seem to apply to the action exercised in the community of Frassinoro by the narratives of my informants' generations. Goody speaks of a process he calls "digestion":

The language is developed in intimate association with the experience of the community, and it is learned by the individual in face-to-face contact with the other members. What continues to be of social relevance is stored in the memory while the rest is usually forgotten: and language – primarily vocabulary – is the effective medium of this crucial process of social digestion and elimination which may be regarded as analogous to the homeostatic organization of the human body by means of which it attempts to maintain its present condition of life (Goody 1968: 30-31).

Language, especially in a primarily oral culture as Frassinoro formerly was, is organised in narratives. The new narrative genres the people had become creators and tellers of are comparable to the "vocabulary", which is the ever-changing dimension of language, the always contemporarily relevant dimension of language, with which one can describe the surrounding world, as it is at the moment. The new anecdotes and stories were guided by the need to "maintain [the community's] present condition of life," in other words by the need to establish what meaning the villagers found in the world.

Despite this need to fence the world out, humorous stories, once inside Frassinoro, worked also in a bridging and revolutionary way, generating discussion of matters and not just confirmation of patterns. The people had after all been influenced by the new life and realities, and as much as they needed to confirm Frassinoreity, their

³⁰ What is most important here, is that, with these counter-narratives we are in the realm of an ad hoc production, which is meant to offer an alternative and an antidote. And it is interesting to focus on the direct approach they display in the deconstruction of narratives. As we shall see in chapter 5, that direct approach was typical of this generation and made a great contribution also in the construction of narratives, in the case of practical jokes and daring-bets that gave origin to village jokes.

Frassinore'sity could not be the same as that of the old ones, as shown by the fact that they needed other entertainments. However, humour was not an invention of my informants' generation and neither were anecdotes the only form of humour. Humour and laughter were a common thing in the village and had been so in many forms for a long time.

2.3 The use of humour.

Before concentrating on the stories, it is worth looking into the tradition of humour in the village. The stories in our corpus were not the only source of humour, although possibly the easiest to use. However, the habit of directing humour towards the villagers was very widespread and it was a daily means of expression.

Eh, someone would tell favole, otherwise they used to tell silly things that made us laugh (Domenica, aged 94).

The habit of telling funny stories in the village goes back a long way, as Domenica's statement proves. She was remembering her youth and, when I asked other informants, they all said that their parents used to tell jokes and play tricks too.

However, there was an increase, and most of all there was the simultaneous abandonment of tales in my informants' generation, and a concentration on humour as a way of interacting.

Where there were peers, there was humour. One means of exchange of humour were the rhymes composed for weddings, called *evviva*.³¹ These could occupy people for hours, and many informants remember wedding parties in which the teasing through extemporised rhymes could last for a whole afternoon. However, the *evviva* had a limited function within society. They could not be used at any time or in any situation. The *stornello*,³² also had a limited use. This was a competitive sung rhyme which was a great summer source of enjoyment, but they were not used to comment on the surrounding world. Besides, especially in the case of the *stornelli*, they often did not really apply to the person towards whom they were directed, or to any

³¹ See Appendix 1 for definition.

³² See Appendix 1 for definition.

concrete village situation. What mattered in them were the rhyme and the speed of the reply.

By contrast, there was one kind of rhyme which was very similar in its functions to the narratives analysed in this work, and this was the rhyme composed outside the place where people gathered to dance. What distinguished these rhymes from many other kinds of rhymes which were being composed in the village was their being written, and not declaimed, as well as their being univocal. They did not imply a ready reply. The authors could be expected to be teased in rhymes after some time, but this was not necessary. The rhymes uncovered what people thought were undetected feelings and behaviours: such as who is in love with whom, and who has been deluded by whom. One interesting aspect of these rhymes, is that most of the time they were written following the fact that the author had been excluded from some kind of community activity. Mario, who was one of the known and beloved authors, remembers:

We used to make *rime*. For example, they danced somewhere, right and...[...] and they did not want us at the dance. And so we would agree with one who was dancing for him to come out and tell us who was there and who wasn't there. And then we made the rhymes. And then we would hang them on the pole, by the fountain. There was an electricity pole, we would hang them there. And in the morning, when they got up and went to read these rhymes! [...]

And then they would react against them, but we could not be very offensive, because otherwise....

Also Giulio Cesare confirmed this dimension of reacting against exclusion through rhymes.

G. C. Instead these are things of the village, where we used to tease each other. Do you understand? For example, I don't know, here they used to have dancing parties, right, little parties. And so there were all the various categories who had their parties, the, the, the shoemakers, the masons, the shepherds, the tailors, etcetera. And so one day the shepherds had a party [...] and they left out a good part [of the villagers], I mean, only the shepherds were invited. And

those who were not invited, those outside, they wrote for them [of the ones inside] a sort of rhyme. Which made us..., made us have great fun. And then they had hung it outside. The following morning it was out [made public] and everyone was...[...] Up there, where the fountain is [...] And there were a few trees there, and they had hung these things [the sheets with the rhymes] to these trees.[...] Even to this day no one knows who wrote them, one can guess, but no one knows.

That pole by the fountain constituted a place for the reception of a narrative, even though in a special form. The rhymes were read, often learned by heart and then repeated on suitable occasions. This is how I could gather the few rhymes I report here. The reactions to reading the rhymes were usually very good, but Mario mentioned one exception, which accounts for the fact that he still remembers the rhyme that was to blame, which he had actually written himself:

There was Alba de la Cella
Who was really all upset
Because Mario, her star,
Was not at the match.
For the anger she was feeling
With no one she spoke a word
And to keep the door well shut
She pushed against it with that bottom of hers.

Many of the rhymes spoke of lovers, and for this reason some girls were particularly scared of them. Not figuring in the rhymes was a matter of pride for Ottavia; it meant to her that she did not have questionable behaviour:

O. I never figured in the rhymes.
L. But were you anxious about figuring in them?
O. Yes, yes. I wouldn't leave the house until I knew what was written in them!

And to sustain her point, she gives me an example. She remembers a rhyme which was addressed to another woman, indeed possibly because this was exactly the kind of rhyme in which she would have hated to figure:

[There was] also Itala with Dorando
Who pays her a visit from time to time
But quite often he gives in,
And heads towards the inn.

At other times, the rhymes targeted the peculiarities people had. Giulio Cesare remembers this happening at the shepherds' party:

Because then they had written a *sonetto*³³ for each participant
to the party, women and men. They had written a *sonetto*, for
example, how can I tell you...

There is also Delfo of Altea
He acts according to his idea;
With the peels of the garden
He wants to make penicillin.

L. Ha, ha, ha.

G.C. Which means they had targeted this guy...

L. And by saying things about them and their lives?

G.C. Yes, and saying real things. Because he, in those days...

Maristella. He used to make experiments...

G.C. He used to make experiments, in those days...we were
children.

Rhymes made people aware of other people. They exposed the villagers and their behaviours, often retracing the stereotypes of the *casate*. The system of the *casate* for individuating people implied that great attention was given to the characteristics of the individual, to be able to identify his main and most distinctive traits, so as to match them with their *casata* or, if one knew the *casata*, to be able to detect the qualities of the *casata* in the individual. This made the people into good observers: and the many nicknames people were and are given, according to their peculiarities, are just one sign of this power of observation. This quality of observing had a great impact on the production of verbal arts. It was a stimulus to humour and sarcasm in particular: it led people to study the villager and his life with an eye typical of comedians or of caricaturists, with the inevitable result of lingering on people's

³³ Here *sonetto* is used with the general meaning of rhyme. Normally, in the village, the word *sonetto* refers to a stanza of seven-syllable verses, which is a typical feature of the *Maggio* scripts (Piacentini 1998: 412).

errors and faults, in which humour was to be found. This tendency was superbly expressed in rhymes. By remembering stereotypes that had been present for generations, they also provided a sort of genealogy for the younger generations who could learn things about the elderly, and learned who was laughed at, thus understanding the mechanisms of power in the community. Having heard the penicillin-rhyme, and knowing that Giulio Cesare was just a teenager at the time, I asked him:

L. And so, when reading these rhymes, you young ones learned things too, you learned things about the people of the village?

G. Yes, indeed for God's sake! Oh, yes, because we used to ask, "What does this mean?" And then there were often things also, [rhymes were] dealing with things about lovers, people who...and it was also a bit...

L. So, somehow you felt on more informal terms with the people...

G. Yes, we would get to know them immediately...One got to know them...and their private life...[such as] being left out from one [group], and being called [to be part of] another [group], also that was all life, a life. Those were things of life in those days, also, both for the young and for the old ones.

And "things of life" were the ones regulated by rhymes. It is not by chance that these rhymes were also called *critiche*, critiques. They were used to admonish, to call back to reality, to call back to order, to make the victim aware that the community was watching. They called for equality and justice and they corrected here and there, with a light touch, when people were being too selfish, or too individualistic, or too something. They brought people back to the village wisdom. They reminded people how a villager ought to think. Rhymes have more of a satirical role than the narratives in the corpus seem to have, as the rhymers make them sound as if he knew a better alternative to the behaviour he criticises. Maybe for this reason, the rhymers, most of the time, remained anonymous.

One interesting thing that can be observed, is that the rhymes are always in standard Italian. Since they are such powerful means of comment on the village reality, one would expect them to be in the dialect.

When I asked Mario why the rhymes were always in Italian he immediately had the answer: rhymes had to be in Italian because they were written, and people could not write or read their dialect. At school, people learned to write the standard Italian and the sounds of their dialect cannot be reproduced with the Italian alphabet³⁴. Marco Piacentini, who wrote a book about the dialect of Frassinoro, had to study for years before he could come up with a way of reproducing the sounds of the dialect.³⁵ Regardless of the increasing use of standard Italian in the life of the villager, however, rhymes stopped being used around the sixties. However, they were revived for a short period in the late seventies and early eighties. Those responsible for the use of the rhymes in those days felt they were being used as “a way, I don’t know, also a bit ironic, to comment upon the things that happened,” as one male informant (aged 48) once remarked. According to this man, who used to compose rhymes during the revival of this genre, the rhymers had real awareness of the fact that they were continuing an old tradition:

Those were practically still, those were the ways of passing the time our old people had, practically. They used to look at things and made an ironic comment on them; they took stock of certain situations, which after all....And there were occasions for quarrels too, at times.

As we moved to talking about the precise object of those rhymes, the informant suggested that the rhymes were used to reveal things for what they really were, and the hypocrisy lying behind certain behaviours, such as things which he saw as being “only excuse[s] for” something else. In those days, rhymes were used for matters of politics too, not for propaganda, but to try and open people’s eyes to the hypocrisy of some behaviours. The rhymers became such free mouthpieces that they were even taken to the police station once and left there for a night. However, no policemen could really know, despite the expert’s reports on samples of handwriting, who the real authors were.

³⁴ A year later, this reason was indirectly confirmed by many people. On the occasion of the end of the school year show, in June 2006, many of the interviewees I met in their role of grand and great grandparents remarked that they admired the ability of the children to read the dialect from a sheet of paper, because they would have never been able to do so.

³⁵ See Appendix 2 for an example of Marco Piacentini’s system for transcribing the dialect of Frassinoro.

In addition to rhymes, there is another important source of humour to be mentioned. It is the ending of tales, which I think provide an important link with the humorous anecdotes in our corpus. Most of the endings were very humorous and often brought the audience back to the reality of things abruptly. There is in them a mix of bitterness and acceptance of the misery of life through humour. This is one of the most common ones:

They had a wedding and a feast, and they gave me a piece of dry cheese. I threw it against the wall; it bounced on my bottom and I still have a hole.

The informants still laugh at this and at the idea that it might be printed. Other codas contained the *nonsense* and the inversion typical of games of words:

They had a wedding and a feast. They gave him a flask of bread and a basket of wine, a bone to lick and a piece of butter. He slipped on the road, the bone got stuck in his bottom and he still has the hole.

As absurd as they are, these codas contain references to the hardship of life, all mixed up with humour. They tell of the condition of the peasant, of the misery of his life. They say that the fairytale positive ending is not for the peasant, but that irony can help him get through.

Some of the humorous anecdotes in the corpus seem extensions of these traditional tale endings, or at least provide a striking echo to them, in the bitter-humorous spirit they display. Providing a bridge between traditional folktales and the humorous narratives in our corpus was a version of an international type (ATU 1358c, *Trickster discovers adultery. Food goes to husband instead of lover*) which I collected from Olga. This tale had undergone a very meaningful adaptation. It had been turned into a personal narrative by her father. The traditional tale, which is a widespread type, was a comic type, which tells of the existence of humour also in traditional tales in the village. Altogether I collected three humorous international types in the village.

However, it is interesting that Olga's father felt the need to adapt it to himself and his brother and insert other characters from a neighbouring village in the story. In other words, he was bringing the element of village reality into the humour of the international tale. One wonders if this expert old storyteller was interpreting the signs of a change in the tastes, and drawing from his repertoire to satisfy the new needs.

As a last example of wit in the village, I include a very special form of performed rhetoric, described by the informants, which was contained in a traditional ceremonial, called "*complimenti*", compliments, which was performed on the day of the wedding, when the party of the groom went to the bride's house, to "convince" her party to let her go to the church with the groom.

This ritual has many parallels in Europe, most of which have been discussed in detail by Neill Martin (2007). Here I touch upon this ritual, only because I feel that this tradition marked other kinds of verbal expression in the village and that the "convincing" speech was in the tradition of the village. Here is how the interviewees describe the *complimenti*.

The groom's party arrives at the bride's house, knocks on the door and is not allowed in. They stay on the threshold and the witty one in the party begins to try and convince the father of the bride to let them in. This is how Maria remembers one particular instance of *complimenti*, on the occasion of a wedding between a man from the lowlands and a girl from Frassinoro:

[Groom's party] We come from the low lands, we are tired.

Do you have a place for us to sleep?

[Bride's party] Well, all my rooms are full.

[Groom's party] Oh, but we would be content with the barn.

[Bride's party] In the barn I have got the donkey.

[Groom's party] And we put the donkey out.

[Bride's party] Oh, but then I've got the hen sitting on eggs, we have no room! [..]

They were outside the door and they said:

[Groom's party] But we are looking for a woman, because we need one.

[Bride's party] There aren't any women here!

[Groom's party] Come on! Can't you really find one!?

And then they started and they took the smallest [the youngest, usually a child] and [...]

What follows is from Mario's recollection of his own wedding day:

Then they sent the oldest sister out.
[Bride's party] Is it this one?
[Groom's party] No, not this one.
And then all the other women [in the family], and Mariola [a
very old lady]
[Bride's party] Is it her?
[Groom's party] No, it isn't.
Until the right one arrived and then
[Groom's party] Oh, this one will do!

At the end of her description, Maria comments "Eh! Before they let them in, they would tell them so many things!" The dialogue could go on for up to forty minutes, for the enjoyment of everyone in the community. Though this ritual relied on a codified dialogue, where almost each word was highly symbolic, it was only a canvas on which the single orator needed to insert his own art.

I believe that this ceremony was possibly a model for other kinds of narratives and certainly influenced the tradition of ready answers (often with veiled meanings, as in this case) which was so appreciated by the people, thus affecting the ways of being witty in the village. There are grounds for believing that the *complimenti* influenced the way of 'performing rhetoric' in the village, as will be seen in the analysis of one story in the corpus in Chapter 5.

On the occasion of Maria's wedding, a man in Giacobbe's party entered the house through a window by means of a ladder, thus putting an end to the ritual (as the house had been entered by the male side). Maria observed that it was a pity, as: "Ah, my relatives were very good, because they were all poets, only they [Giacobbe's party] played them that trick [using the ladder to enter the house] and so they [Maria's party] could not give them trouble!"

Maria means 'give trouble' by means of words. She believes her relatives could have sustained the dialogue for "forty minutes", thus filling it with references, wit and metaphors, if only they had not been interrupted. "*Far tribolare*", create trouble with words, was another way in which the people referred to those who had rhetorical abilities. In the case of the *complimenti*, the main characteristic of this kind

of rhetoric is to show the superiority of the male party, by demonstrating their inexhaustible verbal ability, which is a symbol of a physical endurance and superiority. It is a long process and in this is the art of rhetoric, which embodies the strength of the spirit, as a reflection of the strength of the body. Again, rhetoric leaves the adversary speechless, only at the end of a long series of “trouble[s]”. In this case, wit ‘throws the doors open’, just as the Patriarca’s narrative ability had left all his audience with mouth and eyes wide open.

And, as will be seen in chapter 5, the witty word was the one thing men relied upon to build their virility and to settle situations. It was wit that broke through the threshold.

Chapter 3

*The Corpus*³⁶

3.1 The emergence of the corpus.

The first group interview, as stated in the Introduction, was organised in November 2003. Eleven of us gathered around a big table in the living room of the bed and breakfast in which I was staying. The video camera was clearly visible and the people knew they were there to try and remember the stories of the Patriarca. As I said before, as we were passing around food and drinks, which were considered times for a break by the interviewees, they felt free to tell stories that were not among the ones I had asked for, which is how some of the humorous stories in this corpus came to light.

The first to introduce humour was Dino; twenty minutes into a 'survey' of the past of their parents, he took the occasion of a tragic story that was being told about a woman who used to live in the village, and stepped in, totally changing the theme, by introducing a "true" story, but, as Aldina remarked, "a joke, it isn't a tragedy." This was the first practical joke narrative of many to come. It was played by Dino's father, who was famous for his humour and jocose nature:

1) And so, can I tell one myself? But a true thing, right, because you do not know it. At least the women, the men know it. So it happens that before the war, there was one, he was the son of Carletto, *Carlett*. What was his name, I cannot remember it either.

Fernando. Angiolin.

D. No, the one who went to America.

³⁶ I have chosen to incorporate the narratives I collected in this chapter, rather than group them together as an appendix. In my view this preserves their associative relationships and something of the immediacy and vividness of the performance situations which produced them.

Tullio. Olinto.

D. Olinto, it was Olinto. He passes by the road here... My dad, my dad was there working of course, right, he was a carpenter. He sees him passing by, he says, "Olinto, where are you going?"

Aldina. This is a *scherzo* [practical joke], mind you, it is not a tragedy, right?

D. Do I have to speak in dialect or in Italian?

L. As you wish.

D. These people here understand the dialect too, right, these people.

L. Whatever makes you feel at ease.

D. I feel like either. And so he passes by, *naturally*,³⁷ "Where are you going?" *he says*, "I am going to Montefiorino to have my picture taken." "Oh," *he says*, "but do you need to go all the way to Montefiorino to have your picture taken? I've got a photographic camera myself!" *He says*, "However, you must come back in a quarter of an hour, twenty minutes." And so he prepares the tripod and then, do you remember they used to have those big photographic cameras with the black cloth on top, remember? He put the cloth on, and when it was the right time, he came back, he says, "Strike the pose." He made him turn like that, he says, "Turn a bit, another bit. Perfect." He went back to the photographic camera and went under the black cloth. He unbuttoned his trousers and let them fall down. He turned his bottom towards the guy and said... "Tac, picture already taken!"

Fernando. Picture taken!

D. After this, they ran after each other through the whole village, because he [the guy] wanted to kill him [Dino's father]!

Aldina. This is what we need in the middle of tragedy!

Not everyone laughed as much as they would have wished, as they still did not know how much they could allow themselves the freedom to laugh at 'dirty' jokes. At this point, one of the women recalled the purpose of the gathering and it was not until a good while later that Wanda decided to allow Dino to tell something again. Dino then went on to tell a joke he had heard performed in Palagano, a neighbouring

³⁷ My italics. Naturally, *naturalmente*, is Dino's typical stock word. It can mean 'naturally, or 'of course', but most of the time it is not needed, and it simply conveys special texture to his stories and succeeds in making the audience know that he is telling something to which they have to listen carefully. By uttering it, Dino not only takes time to gather his thoughts, but he also tests the attention of the audience, and the utterance of '*naturalmente*' is often accompanied by his looking around to establish eye contact with all, or some, of the people in the audience.

village which holds a Feast of the Madmen every year, where jokes about the village folk are told.

However, all of a sudden Dino began to introduce himself and Fernando – who happened to be sitting next to him – into the joke he was telling. He was telling a story within the story, whereby he and Fernando had become characters in a narrative frame to the original joke. No one in the audience found what Dino was doing remotely difficult to grasp. They found it amusing, but no one asked him to clarify or explain. It was perceived as a normal adaptation to the occasion, as part of a shared game. The fact that the story was being personalised increased the level of attention among the audience.

The joke is about three hunters from Palagano, who set off one morning to look for the den of a wolf that had, for some time, been eating all the chickens in the area. They decide to wait for a snowy day, so that they can follow the wolf's prints, and when the day comes, they leave, at four o'clock in the morning. In no time at all they find the wolf's prints and follow them to the den. The wolf is inside, and the hunters begin to wonder what to do in order to catch it. At this point, Dino surprised everyone and said:

2) Now, I must pause, me, right? Because, it happens that last night, I thought of that episode. And so I went to see Fernando, I said to him "Hey, Fernando, you must do me a favour," "Eh, what do you want me to do?" I said, "You should take me to Palagano," "Take you to Palagano? What for?" I say, "Because I want to go and see the wolf's den." {Everyone. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha...} Because we are supposed to go down to Oliviero's³⁸ house tomorrow, and we have to tell this fola. But if we have no concrete things to say... {everyone. "Sure, yes."} who's going to believe us? Nobody!" And so he says, "And when are we going?" "We'll go early tomorrow morning," this morning {everyone. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha...} This morning at six, we got up {Onelia. Oh, yes they did.³⁹} and then we went to Palagano. "Eh, but how are we supposed to know where the wolf's den is?" "Eh," I say, "it's easy. We go to the council, and we go there to, to the mayor,

³⁸ Oliviero Marcolini is the owner of the bed and breakfast where I was staying at the time and who allowed us to use his living room to host the first group interview.

³⁹ Onelia is Fernando's wife. She is supporting Dino's story, by confirming her husband left early in the morning to join Dino in their search of the wolf.

whom we don't even know, and we introduce ourselves, as experts of the whole area naturally." And indeed we got to Palagano, and we went to see the mayor and he received us immediately. We didn't say we were from Frasnur,⁴⁰ right!? Because otherwise he would have never ...told us where the wolf's den was. And then, hearing that we were interested in knowing where this wolf's den was, he says, "Oh, but I will take you there!" Very well! We walk towards the Chingh ed Vetta [a nearby area]...And so I, [spoke] first, because I did the talking, because he [Fernando] was a bit silent. Yes, he is not a big chatterbox like me. And so I looked at the den and, I see like from here to here [meaning he cannot see well]. I say, "I see all black," I could well imagine what it must have been like back then [for the hunters]. I say, "Fernando, do [me] a favour, look down a bit and see if you can explain to me what the wolf's den is like." Indeed, he looked and says, "Well, it goes straight down for a good bit and then it turns. I cannot see further than that." And that's it. It ended like that. Now we take [the story] back to the hunters...

And the joke goes on to tell of one hunter putting his head in the den to look for the wolf and being pulled out after a long time, without his head. The hunters, however, are so stupid that they begin to wonder if he had been headless in the first place. "Did he have his head on him when we set off this morning?" They begin to look for it and then decide to go and see his wife, who also seems taken aback by the question and goes upstairs to the bedroom to check if he had taken his head with him in the morning. Because the head could not be found, on their way back to the den, one of the hunters, the 'clever' one, suddenly thought. "For God's sake! Could it be that the wolf ate his head?!"

Stepping right into the ongoing laughter, Dino began a story about a trick his father had played on a man known to everyone in the village. The atmosphere in the room was really starting to change. The trick was among those considered "heavy" (i.e. 'rough'). The trickster in the joke is Dino's father who was nicknamed *Fasul* (lit. 'bean').

3) My father..., Giacobbe [addressing Giacobbe] you and everyone know he was a very cheerful man, more or less like I am. I am not like that, like him, but almost. *And so it*

⁴⁰ Dino plays on a well known, but only nominal, rivalry between Frassinoro and Palagano.

happens, they [a bunch of men] were in my aunt Mariuccia's house, when she used to have the inn, right? And so they were there, playing briscola [an Italian card game] without pause. And there was Calisto too. And my dad arrives there, and having seen that Calisto is there... You know where I built that tool shed, that thing in the vegetable garden, the vegetable garden was all surrounded by a hedge, do you remember it? And so what did he do?

He left home, he went behind the hedge and then he went and relieved himself, because my dad was like that, and I remember him with pleasure also for that reason. He relieved himself and then he went to play **briscola**.

And he says, "Hey, if anyone *comes to help me catch a hen*, I'll give him a cigar or two." {the women call a break for a slice of cake}

D. And so it happens that [...] *it went like this*, he knew that Calisto, you all knew him, right, he was the one who used to say "*I'm cobing* [for a fault in pronunciation, instead of *ven* (come) *mì* (me, I), he used to say *Ven bì*], *I'm cobing!*"

Maria. *That is true!*

Marco. I'm coming.

D. *I'm cobing!* [Dino stresses *bì*]

Tullio. He used to talk like that.

D. He talked like that, right? Right. "*A hen escaped in the vegetable garden. To the one who comes to help me catch it, I'll give two cigars.*" Ready, they both left and went into the vegetable garden, because there weren't any public lights like now, right, it was all dark.

He guided him naturally, here and there, and then, "Be careful, 'cause it should be more or less here, right here." He ended up, naturally, where he had relieved himself...

So it happens, when they get there, "Go, go, go, it's there!" Ooh! He wished he'd never done it, afterwards...there were no toilets anywhere, there was running water, right....

Tullio. At the public fountain! Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha...!

D. Yes, "We must go," right, "to the public fountain, and then you will wash as well as you can." {Onelia. *Had he not caught it [the hen] in his hat?* ⁴¹} But he gave him his two cigars.

Fernando. *But he used the hat* [to catch the hen].

D. No, no, no, *he went* there without a hat, with his [bare] hands, 'cause he was afraid he might [end up] squeezing the hen [had he used the hat].

⁴¹ In those days, they used to catch hens with their hats.

After this, Giacobbe told a traditional tale he had been trying to remember beforehand and everyone was moved to remembering the style of telling the Patriarca used to have, because Giacobbe apologised by saying that he could not make it as long and embellished as the Patriarca would have done.

Into the middle of these scattered memories comes Dino again: "Well, it happens that I heard this one in Sassuolo, on the main square." He told another joke and he adapted this one to the village too. The joke was about a couple celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary, something Dino and other couples in the room had celebrated jointly a few years before: an occasion they all like to remember very often. Each of them has pictures of that event in their homes, some hanging on the walls, and they have often shown them to me, with great pride.

In this joke, Dino introduces Maria as a character, thus implying that the couple in the story is from Frassinoro. After the anniversary party, when it is time to go to bed, the wife is willing to make herself attractive for her husband. The husband is too tired however. But she does not give up. Here is what follows in Dino's words:

4) *And so they go to bed, Tugin gets in the bed. He was sleepy, you know. He was tired, because with all those [celebrations]... And, instead, she had gone to the bathroom, she went to the bathroom – she had bought a night dress from, from Maria of Giacobbe's [shop], because back then she used to sell nightdresses, right, back then. And so she had bought this nightdress, all beautiful, see-through, and she wears this nightdress and she shows up in front of Tugin. She says, "Oh!" she says, "Look at this!" And so he looks a bit, with difficulty, with as much difficulty as I can see now, he says, "Well then, what kind of novelty is this?" He says, "But have you spent...? Where did you buy that nightdress?" "Eh, I bought it from Maria d'Iacob." He says, "Really?" he says, "You spent that money too? After having spent all that money, for the musicians and everyone, and the lunch, and the dinners, and all...that one [the nightdress] is all we needed now". "Eh," she says, "of course!" she says, "I hope you don't want us to do it that way" [she means 'the usual way', which is not appropriate to the special night], she says to Tugin. He says, "But, look, I am so tired that..., don't, don't bother with..., because he had understood that she had certain intentions, right?" She says, "But, but..." But for heaven's sake, she was not satisfied, she went back to the bathroom and she wore*

another nightdress – before it was black, now it was azure, all fret worked, all, a nice thing. And she went back there. And so, his eyes were half opened, he had an eye...*And so she says, "Hey dummy!" she says to him, "Hey you dummy!" she says, "take a look at this." He says, "Well then this one now, why did you change nightdress?" She says, "Why did I change nightdress?" He says, "Why did I change nightdress? Because I bought them!" "You bought this one too, always at Maria's," "Eh, always at Maria's." "Ah," he says, "that's all we need," he says, "then we'll have to stay without food for eight days!"*

Tullio: *She used to sell thirteen for a dozen...*[i.e. Maria actually used to have very cheap prices.]

D. And so, no way! *He says, "Please, come to bed and put an end to all this, to these novelties!" "Well," she says, "fine then, I'll come to bed, but believe me, I am not very satisfied with the way we are ending all this!"* She goes back to the bathroom, naturally, and then she comes back to Tugnin. He was almost asleep, *she sh-, she shook him well and he opened one eye. He says, "And what about this one now!?" She says, "This is the nightdress my mother made me". He says, he says, "Well, but then, since she made it, she could have ironed it a bit!"*

{Breathless general laughter}

Finding his way into the laughter for this story, Dino began another one, this time the beginning of a married life, his. The story tells of Dino and Aldina's honeymoon in Bolzano, where Dino's sister used to work as a maid. The people knew the story well, as proved by the fact that when he was introducing it, Maria said to him "Tell it, that's a good one!" ("*Cuntla, c' l'è bèla!*").

5) Well then, I got married in '47, right? As you know there weren't any cameras. We were poor, poorer than now let's say, right. And so I went on my honeymoon, I left from here and went to my sister's, in Bolzano. Up there, Anna of Preti had made her flat available for me, right, and my sister lived below us. We were upstairs. And so when we arrived up there [in Bolzano], naturally my brother had given me a camera.

{Everyone laughs}

You know, ha, ha, ha, I didn't even know how to make it work. I couldn't make it work. And so up there, they have the various bridges, and in those days you would find a photographer on the bridge taking pictures of the tourists that

passed by. And so they saw us as two tourists, right. *He says*, "These two are tourists, without doubt."

Tullio. Yes, both photogenic.

Dino. Yes. *He says*, "Signore, would you like your picture taken?" "But can't you see I have the tool here?! There is no point in you taking pictures."

I went back home to my sister's, *I said*, "I will end up arguing with the photographer before the end of my honeymoon." "I hope you don't do that." "Well, *I'm nearly there!* Because They can't..., they must understand that if I have the tool, *they [cannot] come and take my picture*. Do I count for nothing?"

As it happened, though, I was not taking any pictures with that [camera]. And so I say, "We must go and have our picture taken Aldina," at least a souvenir, right, at least one. Now they take three hundred of them, those who take a few of them, otherwise they will range from three hundred upwards, or the photographer won't even [bother to] come, right. The photographer doesn't even go.

And so we went to Alcapone's. We went in, [in] the photographic studio you know all beautiful. There was a blond lady you know, at the table [he means the counter], taking orders, right? And so we sat down, because the photographer was busy. And so I say to Aldina, "Oh well," I say, "we came to a place where, who knows how much the picture will cost us!" I say, "You know what we should do?" – ask [addressing Onelia] Aldina, I'm not telling lies, right – I say, "You know what we should do Aldina? You tell them you are not feeling well and then we'll leave. Otherwise, pay attention to how much that man there pays when he passes to the till," right? "According to how much he pays [he claps his hands twice to signify: "Done!"]", we say, "We are going out, because she does not feel too good. We'll be back tomorrow," they don't know us after all. And so the moment came when they told us to go in to the photographic studio. Spotlights you know, here and there, everywhere. I say, "*Here we pay an awful lot.*"⁴² *Remember, it is true.*" And so they took our picture, he says, "What lengths do you want it to be, sir?"

Because Aldina shut up, I did the talking⁴³. That's it. I say, "I want them to be really natural, you know." *He says*, "no," *he says*, "they look better half-length, then a bit blurred at the bottom of the picture." "Eh", I say, "it was my wife who

⁴² This is the meaning, but I could not make out the actual words.

⁴³ It is interesting to notice that this echoes almost exactly what Dino said of Fernando in narrative 2. This is Dino's style and personal frame for humorous narratives. In his stories, he often has a mute companion. The situation of a couple in which one does the talking and the other is mute is possibly one of the most successful comic devices and Dino proves to be able to use it well.

wanted them like that, natural. I am happy with half-length. Then we make them half-length." "Then we'll do it half-length." Mm, that's fine. And so, afterwards, I went to the till, to say..., right? And so, "How many copies should we make?" "Well", I say, "one or two." "Oh, come on," *he says*, "but since we've done the negative, [there is no difference] between doing one and doing six, more or less."

Fernando. It's all the same.

Dino. "Well," I say, "it was my wife who wanted just one, like that, as a souvenir of Bolzano." *Me* [he points to himself as if to say, "I really did say it"], *but it's true that I used to tell him that, right?*

And ciao [meaning, 'And that's it.'].]

"Well then," I say, "make six then" "Shall we do it with retouch or without retouch." "*No way, all this business, really!*" I said exactly this, "we want them to be natural, without retouch!"

"But you know, in the picture there could be a few little things, which do not really look good, and they get retouched. It's a matter of two or three *lire* more for each picture."

Anna. Oh well, if that's all!

Dino. "And then retouch! What difference can it make to us!"

And ciao. And so then I say, "Mind that... the pictures, one of my sisters will come to ..."

Fernando. Collect them.

Dino. "...to collect them, because we turn the corner as soon as the moment comes." And ciao. When my sister went back there to collect the pictures, "But you must tell me about that gentleman. Was he your brother?" *She says*, "Yes". "What a character!" *he said*, "he was blaming his wife for everything. He did not want them retouched, he wanted only one picture, he [wanted them] half bust, and always put the blame [on her]...."

To end the story, we got six pictures. When we came back to Frassinoro, we started distributing them. But you know, six of them, it doesn't take long to [hand them out] right? [...]

And so, to conclude, we distributed the pictures right away. "Urgently," I rang my sister naturally, "Pictures urgently needed, because here they are most successful!" I say, and when she went back there, he says, "Oh, but such a character!" "Well, that's what he's like."

At this point, Giacobbe spoke and stayed within the same humorous vein, telling three stories, also about marriage and village life, one after the other, among wholehearted laughter from all the participants:

6) *I must have told you the one about aunt Menga* [addressing Dino]. When they got married they were young, not like now that, now...

Marco: *They rehearse* [ironic way of saying that people live together before the wedding nowadays].

G. *They rehearse, and so on, but in the old days! My aunt Menga, she was young – he was young too – and she had desire[...]* And indeed, *the night arrived, they went to bed, and she quickly, quickly undresses, but Massimo was not coming to bed.*

Fernando: Eh, no!

G. *She says, "Well then, but you..."*

Maria. *He was on his knees, reciting his prayers.*

Marco. *He was reciting the rosary.*

G. *She looks for him and he was kneeling down on a chair, near a painting, praying, you know that used to be the habit, right?*

She says, "Well then, I hope you don't believe that it's the Holy Spirit that is going to come with me?!"

Fernando: *Eh, this is a good one!*

{Long general laugh}

7) Once upon a time, our elderly, and then we too, used to go to work in Sardinia, in Africa or in France. We would go away for five or six or seven months. And I remember there used to be a man in Casa Gianasi – I am not mentioning his name *because it is not polite, right – he came back home from Sardinia* in the month of May. His wife, they had been married for a year, *she had been for six or seven months without,...without company, let's say.* And indeed, *when he came home, she cooked a nice lunch, a nice dinner, then when the time to go to bed arrived, she says, "So how are you doing?" she says, "Well, I am sleepy," he says to her, "I'm tired," "Come on..." "Be patient please," he says, "tomorrow morning, if I can make it, ha, ha, ha, tomorrow morning." Ha, ha, ha! And so she was persuaded [...], she fell asleep, she waited a bit and then she fell asleep. But she was in a hurry [impatient], she said "As young as I am, having to go through so much trouble for..."* {Dino laughs a lot}. And so, since it was a common thing that everyone had animals to feed, *they had cows in the shed. And when...she used to feed them, and look after them in the morning, but [she] usually would not go and take care of them before six or seven in the morning, and she woke up and said "Well then I'm going to look after the cows..."*

Wanda. *The donkey.*

G. What?

Wanda. *The donkey.*

G. *No, no, she had cows! And so she went to the shed – it was early, poor beasts, they were all lying tired - “For God’s sake!” she said, “you too!” She picked up a stick, “Have you been to Sardinia too!?”*

{everyone laughs wholeheartedly}

G. *But it’s true.*

Wanda. *No, no, it’s true.*

D. *Yes, but, at your age, you should be ashamed* {general laughter}

Given the great success of these stories with his audience, Giacobbe told another one, which his wife, Maria, tried to prevent him from relating, but was actually delighted to hear again. This story reduced all of us to fits of laughter we could hardly control. And due to my laughter I could not pick out the interviewees’ comments after the story, if they were able to utter any.

8) *I’ll tell you this one too now, another one. It’s a bit different. Once they used to have the house, below there was a shed, right [he turns towards his audience where everyone nods to confirm], they had a shed below...*

Maria. This one actually, *you could avoid telling it.*

{everyone laughs}

G. *And so, on top they had the bedroom and the kitchen, the kitchen, then they had a wall of wood, and then they had the bedroom, then they had the trap door, because if they needed [to go to the loo] they could avoid going to the field. They went in the shed, right, they had a ladder...*

W. It was the night bathroom.

G. Right, in those days, that what places looked like. *In the night, they had four or six calves, with some beasts and the beasts did not make much milk for the calves, these poor beasts. And so, what happens: a calf unties itself, and so all these beasts “mu, mi, ma, ma!” “Angiola!” she says, “can you hear that a beast must have untied itself in the shed,” “Eh,” he says, “now I’ll go and check.” In those days, they used those [he gets up from the couch to mime part of the scene] [laugh], there were those night dresses, this long [he shows it to reach just underneath the hips]. He went down the ladder, slowly, and then he caught the calf. To tie the calf he bent forward. Those calves that were behind him... [he mimes the calves’ action and by now everyone laughs so much they are out of breath]. It took everything in his mouth! And then it pulled [...], it pulled! Ha, ha, ha, ha....*

Dino. [while laughing, directed to me] Don't go and tell these things up there in Scotland, right!?

This was the last narrative in this interview. As one can see, the humorous stories intensified towards the end and one initiated another, leaving no space between them for memories or for non-humorous narratives.

During the second group interview, when I declared no intention of collecting any specific material, the people spontaneously concentrated on anecdotes, all of which were humorous. The presence of Martino, the shoemaker, had made Fernando and Dino particularly at ease and the stories came out, one after the other. Dino still visits Martino in his shop and so does Fernando, and these are occasions during which they exchange anecdotes at high speed.

They all met one another with cheering handshakes and enquiries about each other's health, then moved on to remembering people they all knew, relatives they had in common and who were absent. Once again, they approached each other indirectly, by interposing chats about people they had in common, and not by talking directly about themselves. The chats about relatives were a step towards intimacy, a way of breaking the ice and beginning interaction, as if they were introducing themselves to each other again.

Martino, whom I met that afternoon for the first time, recited a poem about the church bell of Frassinoro, which the priest used to recite in church. Then, this time too, they moved to legends, because Aldina, who was the hostess that night, told them I wanted to know about the old times. They began to say that in the old days the old folk used to say that there were places where people could hear and see things.

At this point Martino began to say that he could hardly remember things and he expressed his confusion as to what I wanted from them. To get out of this situation, and to try and establish a link with them all, I told everyone that I had been visiting Suor Costanza a few days before. As usual, they wanted to know what I had been told by her and I said she had told me some folktales and a funny story about herself trying to play the school teacher for the sheep she used to mind.

This was possibly the thing that set the trend of the day, as Dino surfed on my small humorous account and took the chance to tell a narrative of a practical joke, another one his father had played:

9) Dino. My father was a type like that, he liked to joke with everyone [...] And so it happens there was a man whose name was Dorando[...] And so it happens that *he was a carpenter, my father, right?* The thing is *there was a friend of his*, who was about to get married [...] *And so it happens that, naturally, this Canacc – they called him so – goes there, “Fasul, you should build a bedside table for me because I’ve got to get married”.*

Have I told it to you [before]?

L. No.

D. Yes. *And so he says, “Very well then, when is it you’re getting married?” He says, “I’m getting married in a fortnight,” I say [a number just to say one]... “Very well, that’s all very well.” And so it happens that, afterwards, the father, Giuggi’s father, was about to have a son, because he had got married beforehand. He says – he comes, he comes up here to see my father – he says, “Hei, Fasöl, you should make a cradle for me, because I’m about to have a little girl or a little boy”. He says, “I have a commitment to make the bedside table,” he says, “for Canacc, but,” he says, “let’s do this way,” he says, “I’m thinking of it just now. I’ll build the cradle and then bring it to Canacc,” right? “But when I take it there [to Canacc’s home], I’ll tell you, and you will come in the neighbourhood,” ... there is still the street, it’s still there.*

A. Near Fernando.

D. Near Fernando, near there, just attached to Fernando. *He says, “Very well.” Sure enough, he made the cradle, he built the cradle, naturally, and then he put it on his shoulder, he goes there, he says, “Canacc, open the door!” “You know, there were all those nicknames, there were all those nicknames, right? He says, “Oh, Fasöl is here, he brought the bedside table.” When he opened the door, he saw the cradle ...uuuuuhhhh!!!*

A. He flew into a rage.

D. *Because he, because then he [Dino’s father] had said to Giorg, Giuggi’s father, he says, “Like this we can hear Canacc cursing!” because he was one who could tell blasphemies like I’d better not tell you!”*

When he opened [the door], the sky opened up, because of all the blasphemies he was telling!

“No, you ordered me a cradle!”

“But how could I have ordered you a cradle if I am still to get married!?”

And so, Giorg passes by and says, "What is it you are quarrelling for?!"

"Eh," he says, "this idiot here," he says, "he brought me a cradle, when I ordered a bedside table!" "No, you ordered a cradle from me!" Anyway, a pandemonium [started] that had no end. "Eh," he says, "this is not the end of the world, is it?" He says, "I'll buy the cradle," Giorg, right?

He says, "And what about my bedside table?" "Well, your bedside table..., first of all we go down to my sister's," at the inn, right? "And then we'll talk about it." They started to drink a glass, two, three, you understand? "And I'll make the bedside table for you once you're married."

Thinking I was still in search of *fole*, they asked Martino to tell one, but this request reminded him of the fact that his wife's father used to know many *paure* and stories about the village. Alba, Martino's wife, then took the floor and told an anecdote her father used to tell, which was in line with the humorous atmosphere and was not at all a *paura*:

10) Once he [her father] was in Sardinia, he was in Sardinia. And so, many of them were unable to write, and one of the company would write for them. And so, when they wrote home, this man wrote, and he read to the others and then wrote again for..., well for the one who could not write. And so there was one [man] from Sassatella, with them. And so *he* [her father] says, "a letter came and it said that his [of the man from Sassatella] wife had died." And so they did not know how to tell him. *He says, "How can we tell him..."* and so, he [the man from Sassatella] says, "*Well then, what news?*" because when [the letter arrived everyone enquired about the content]...

Everyone. Right, right.

Alba. "*Well,*" he says, "*we don't have very good news for you, we have to tell you that your wife died.*"

He says, "Is that right? Well then, write! Tell them to bring me her skin so that I can beat it with a stick!"

{everyone laughs}

At this point they fell back into conversation and Martino said we should talk about how families used to live, supposedly because he felt that some context was needed to understand the humour of this story. He talks of community feelings and

the habit of communal help in the past. And then they moved on to memories about the day the emigrants left, when the coach used to leave the village and everyone went to wave goodbye. Aldina tells of the *bensun*, the cake that was baked for those who left and which had become such a symbol of it that it was even recorded in a poem by a female villager. They tell of how tragic that day was and, at this point, Dino says: "Well, then, since you spoke of the *bensone*, one [story] comes to my mind":

11)

You must know that I was on a military permit, me and Tobia. And Maria d'la Sasdella [Sasdella was the nickname of the girl's mother] was about to leave [to go to Florence in service]. It was a pretty well off family [which only meant they had enough to eat] and her mother was desperate because Maria wanted to leave and go in service. The two of us go to the house, being a bit like two bandits [he means it in a jocular sense]. Naturally, the mother tells us "*Well, my dear Maria wants to leave, she wants to go to Florence.*" Naturally, you know, we tell her [Maria], "*Oh, but surely you do not need to go to Florence,*" me and Tobia said. "*Well yes, I want to go to Florence, because I am tired of staying here, 'cause here there is nothing to be had anyway and everyone leaves, all my friends.*" So what did we do? We made her undo the lace that kept her suitcase closed and, since she had a **bensone** [the cake that was always baked for those who left the village for work or war], we ate all her **bensone** and in the end she stayed. And so her mother said, "*Oh Dino, if my Maria has it in her mind to go away again, I will let you know, right?*"

Then, again about the *bensun*, Alba says "And when Giuggi...", and Martino starts to tell the story he understood she was referring to:

12) Giuggi, *the one about Giuggi. Giuggi, when he went, he went to do military service, right? He was going to do military service [or to the Front] and Turruncina [Giuggi's mother's nickname] had made the bensun for him. When he got to the station in Bologna, he had the bensun under his arm, right, he had the bensun under his arm, he had the bensun under his arm and someone was even able to steal it from him [piece by piece]. They were able to lift it out [from under his arm] and ...Only the paper was left.*

Dino then says, "Now then I must tell one about myself..." This is a very witty story, which I do not include, as it has a more private content. Aldina, as Dino started telling it, said he should not, and interestingly, Dino said: "When she says so, she's actually pushing me to tell!" and he went on to tell his story, which had never been heard by the others, but which made them laugh wholeheartedly.

"Then I'll tell you one" says Martino, on the wave of the laughter for the previous story. The rhythm intensifies and the stories are introduced one after the other:

13) I'll tell you one of two recruits who were going to the military front, right? *They were your Sesto* [Anna's brother. Martino says this directed to Anna, who is sitting on his right] *and Ismino*, right? Sesto and Ismino in the morning *go down [to the lowlands] by coach. When they arrive in Modena* – they were supposed to go and visit..., somebody from Frassinoro, anyway, who lived in Modena. And so they went around there and then they stopped, in front of the main entrance, in front of the main entrance, one on one side and one on the other. They walked by, the people walked by and saw these..., these two poor guys and gave them alms! Oh, we laughed so much at his story! *He says, he says*, "Well, we learnt the method [to earn some money]..."
D. To earn money without working.

Then Dino says, "Fernando, you tell one," and Fernando, who already had one story in mind says, "No, Martino knows this one better. It's the one about Giuggi when he went to pick chestnuts with Sara." Everyone laughs, as they know exactly which story it is, and Maria says, "No, you tell it. I heard you telling it [before] and you tell it well". And indeed Fernando tells the story he had in mind:

14) And so Giuggi asks Sara if she wanted to go picking chestnuts with him. They go for chestnuts and they get to the Cà [an area in the village]. He says, "*Let's go to the Caselle* [a field south of the village]. "Let's go to the Caselle." It was raining a bit, they got to the Caselle and they began to pick up chestnuts and *they gathered ten or fifteen kilos of them*. The owner of the chestnut wood arrives and he says, "What are you doing?" "Eh," he says, "we are gathering chestnuts."

He says, "But, are they yours?" "No! But we can pay for them." "No, no," he says, and so he grabbed the bag and threw everything out. *He [Giuggi] says, "Then, what could we do? We had to go a bit further up. We cross a vegetable garden where there were some beehives" – they cross the garden where the beehives were and inside there were the bees.* He says, "*They did not do anything to me, but they went all up her skirt! My God.., mamma mia, my God mamma mia,*" she says, "*Oh my God, my arse, oh my God, my arse!*" {everyone laughs} "Eh," he says, "what can we do?"

"We were alone," he says, "But," he says, "what can I do?" And so this woman, right, she was in pain, he began to hit her a bit, I mean he began to spank her on the bottom, right? *And he saw that the bees were beginning to fall down, dead.* And so the bees came down senseless. Well, you know, he had put together a heap like this [he mimes a tall heap], right! And she kept saying she was in pain. And so she says, "Go on, go on..." And that was it, it seemed all solved. "We start walking again, 'Oh my God, my arse, Oh my God, my arse!'" "Eh," he says, "what now, the bees aren't there anymore" "*But I am in so much pain!*" He says, "*There's the stings,*" the sting, right? The trouble was that there were lots of them, they must have been two or three thousands {Everyone. Ooooh!!!}. That's what he says.

And so he says, "I began to perform the operation," he says, "you can imagine. I made this pile of things." "Eh," she says, "now I feel a bit better." And so they started making their way home, because they had created such a confusion, that the chestnuts were no longer important. They get to the Hut, which is a place here. There was a brook. *She says, "Giuggi," she says, "I can no longer stand the pain!" "Eh," he says, "I killed the bees, the stings were extracted..." "Oh mamma mia, oh mamma mia!" He says, "I really don't know what else to do!" He said, "I had to pull her skirt up, and go to the brook," he says, "and then I rinsed her, like this." He says, "Had that brook not been there, she would be dead."*

At this point they all begin to remember their friend Giuggi, they tell me about him and who he was and of his great imagination. Alba immediately introduces another example of their friend's wit:

15) When we were young [girls], we were not allowed to go to dance.

We had to ask our parents for permission. And so, one evening they were supposed to go dancing. He says, "Go and

invite so and so.” He says, “Go to invite Nice.” “Oh well,” he says, “they will not allow Nice to come, you know.” *He says...ha, ha, ha...“I’ll go.”*

Maria. Giuggi?

A. Giuggi. *He says*, “Do you want to bet that they’ll let her come with me?” and so he goes up to the house, *he says*, “Ah, good evening,” “Eh, good evening, what did you come here for?” “Look, I came to ask you a favour,” he says, “to let Nice come to a dance.” He says, “If you let her come, you will do me a favour, and if you don’t let her come, you’ll do me two [favours].”

“Well then! Right for that [reason], I will let her come!”

He says, “*We saw him coming down the hill with Nice.*” He says, “*I told you that...* [they would let her come with me].”

At this point Onelia asks for another story about Giuggi, “And the one about the photograph...?”, but Maria is already telling another one, also about an invitation to dance, though not about Giuggi. The punch line was very similar: “If you let her come, you will do us a favour, if you don’t, we’ll do without!” However, the consequences were very different. This mother did not allow her daughter to go anyway, and the group of boys kicked the light outside the house and, in the dark, they started hitting the bottom of the girl’s mother. Maria did not know this end of the story. It was Fernando and Onelia who finished the story and they replied to Maria’s surprise by saying, “Yes, it’s always been told this one [this story]”.

Martino reintroduces the character Giuggi:

16) It was always that Giuggi there, during the war time, right, someone had taken some of his stuff away.

F. The harness of his horse.

M. I don’t know [who], [maybe] the partisans, or I don’t know.

Anyway, this Giuggi begins a search for his things, right? And so he takes a sack and he put his umbrella in it, and he goes to San Pellegrino.

Anna: [looking at me] That’s true, really!

M. ‘Cause there had been there a concentration [of partisans], and he went there to look for this person, right, and so there was a **signorina** there who, who looked at him. He says, “She was looking at this sack,” *he says*, “**Signorina**, are you afraid of weapons?” *She says*, “I am!” “Away from that sack then!”
{loud general laughter}

Dino: Ha, ha, ha...He had the umbrella in it!

Without even waiting for the laughter to fade, Martino says: "But the best one is that of Iusun and Don Pigoia...":

17) He [Iusun] had to give a lift to a priest from Riccovolto who, well anyway, he liked wine. He says, "*Iusun,*" he says, "*would you take me to Vitriola with your mule, because well...*" "*Yes, yes,*" he says, "of course." And so, to repay him he[the priest] says, "*I'll bring a flask of wine,*" and so they leave with this mule, and the flask of wine...

Alba. On a gig.

M. On a cart...ha, ha, ha...When they are two miles away, not even that much, the cart loses a wheel and the two passengers are thrown out, right?

{everyone laughs}

And so the priest says, he [Iusun] says, "*Are you injured....*"

Everyone: Don Pigoia.

M....Don Pigoia? He says, "*Look,*" he says, "*my head is broken, but the flask is here!*" [he mimes the priest lifting his arm, holding the saved flask high up⁴⁴]

{everyone laughs}

Within the fading laughs – and with some of them remarking how nice life was in the old days, when they used to "laugh at such things" – Maria tells the people around her another story about Don Pigoia. A very brief punch line-story which Aldina asks her to repeat, just as Dino was also trying to tell a story. Maria's story was about the time Don Pigoia had tried to pass some pig fat off, to his faithful parishioners, as relics of a Saint!

At this point Dino can tell the story he had thought of, which was also about Iusun, and which ties in with the one Martino had just told, because of the shared weakness for wine:

18) And so that of Iusun, naturally they were in the square in Piandelagotti [a village located 5 miles from Frassinoro].

And it happens that he likes wine a lot, right, this Iusun too.

He starts a discussion with a man who had a dog which

⁴⁴ See still from this moment in Appendix 4.

looked like a lion; *he says* [...] a man wouldn't have faced this dog. *He says*, "But what can your dog be!" *he says*, "go and get it," he says, "it doesn't bother me in the least."

Fernando. "I am not afraid of it at all!"

Dino. He stands there, *he says*, "What shall we bet?" "Let's bet a flask of wine," because they used to go [sustain themselves] on wine, right?

F. [A diet] based on flasks!

D. And so they go to get the dog, and it really was a dog that could scare you, right?

They were in the square, *he says*, he had a whip, because he was a coachman, you know, as we already said before. *He says*, "I keep the whip in my hand, and you'll see, your dog won't do absolutely anything to me," *he says*. And so, he says, "Go ahead, send him here," he says. He sent it there, and the dog stopped. He says, "*Come on, it's bluffing* {everyone laughs}. *Send it here.*" *He says*, "*I gave him such a lash!*" And the dog stopped. But naturally he [the owner of the dog] was a bit taken aback, "*Go ahead, go ahead, send him closer, so that he comes closer.*" "*I gave it such a lash,*" *he says*. All the fur on its back came off, you know. But you should hear it told by him, because he had a characteristic way of telling it.

Aldina. Fernando does a good impression of him.

Fernando. The dog leaves running.

Dino. He says, "Hey, go and phone Castelnuov in Garfagnana, to see if they have seen your dog pass!"

Fernando. Yes, yes, *he says*, "*Phone immediately and ask if it has arrived!*"

Once he has agreed on the final punch-line, Fernando immediately introduces another story: "and when the umbrella maker was [in the village]?" This is the same as the one Dino had thought of before, when he was interrupted. In the end Dino says, "Then you tell it, we tell a piece each." And Fernando is already about to start:

19) When there was the umbrella man, when the umbrella man came to Frassinoro. There is always Sara's mother involved, and Iusun, he of the dog.

Dino. Right.

F. And so, there is this umbrella seller, he goes to sleep at Mariuccia's [this woman had an inn], who was Sara's mother, and they are neighbours [with Iusun]. In the middle of the night, this old man feels sick and he gets a bit of diarrhoea. He does his little job in the pot, because back then there weren't any...

D. There weren't any bathrooms.

F. And at some point, he says, "I'll throw it out." He throws everything out, right, and it ends up on Iusun's door. In the morning, his wife gets up, his wife gets up and *she says*, "*Oh Iuseff [how she called Iusun, whose real name was Giuseppe]*" *she says*, "*look at this,*" *she says*, "*look at the state of this door!*" *He says*, "*What have they done?*" *She says*, "*Go and have a look.*" "*Oh!*" *he says*, "*well, by the look of this,*" *he says*, "*there must be a stranger in Mariuccia's house.*" "*Why?*" *she says*. "*Well,*" *he says*, "*by the looks of it...*" "*My God,*" *she says*, "*what a coat of paint!*" "*Yes, I know, I'm going to check...*"

Dino. *It's the little man.*

F. "*I am going to check, there must be the little man [in Mariuccia's house], the one with the umbrellas.*" And indeed, he goes to Mariuccia's house, "Good morning, good morning." "Oh, Giuseppe, come in." "I would like to speak to the umbrella man." "*Eh*" *she says*, "*he's getting up. Do you need...?*" "No," *he says*, "*I've got something to tell him.*"

And so the umbrella man arrives, "Good morning" [Fernando pronounces it with a Tuscan accent], he was a Tuscan; "tell us sir, any umbrellas?" "No, no". *He says*, ha, ha, "Are you the one who painted my door? Ha, ha, ha.. "No," *he says*, "I haven't..." ha, ha... "*No,*" *he says*, "*because you,*" *he says*, "*you painted it with a colour,*" *he says*, "I don't like it." {general laughter}

Dino. Because it used to be green.

F. Yes. *He says*, "No," *he says*, "look, I felt sick..." "I know," *he says*, "but when you have to paint doors, especially mine, *you must tell me the colour, you must ask me what colour* [I want it painted in]."

On top of the laughter comes Dino:

20) Well then, always Iusun, he used to accompany the Tuscans....and so, once again Iusun, he used to take, used to take the Tuscans, used to take the Tuscans [he repeats it until people have stopped laughing at the previous story and he has their full attention] he used to take the Tuscans to the top of the Monte up there, above Rovolo, Romanoro, because there did not use to be the road, right? There were two of them, there was this Iusun and Cagg {General laughs. They all know the story}. *Cagg, right, you remember him, right?*

Everyone. Yes.

Dino. And so Cagg arrives at this Iusun's house, he says, "*Oh, Iuseff, the friends have arrived,*" because they used to

give them a bit of money, right. They had to get going, *he says, "Yes, yes. I'm coming," he says, "wait a moment."* He goes to the bottom of the staircase, right, he had the staircase that goes up to the bedrooms: "*Cesira! Come downstairs!*" "*What do you want!?*" [pronounced with a high pitched squeaky voice] She had a bit of a peculiar voice. "*Come downstairs 'cause I need [to tell you] something!*" He was really serious, right? When she got to the bottom of the stairs, *he said to her, "Blow your nose, and give me a little kiss, 'cause I'm going away."* {general laughter} [Anna. Ha, ha,...Oh, my God! Ha, ha...} Because she always had a runny nose, right? "*Blow your nose and give me a little kiss, 'cause I'm going away.*"

Fernando. "Clean you nose, because..."

Dino. Oh well, sometimes we used to laugh so much!

Martino. [We were living] in misery let's say. But despite this...

Dino. *Well, but sometimes we used to laugh so much!*

Martino. Within our misery, let's say, {Dino. Eh, that's how we enjoyed ourselves}, however, it was an enjoyment for us, when we could collect certain [stories].

These stories were making them recall the atmosphere of the old days. Alba interrupts their reverie, to begin another story:

21) One night he [Iusun] was playing *briscola* with him [Martino] and another man – it was late, and he had a son with him. And so we were all there in silence, because it was late, it was after midnight. The door opens, and his wife comes in: "Isn't it time to come home yet!?" "Shut up!" *Your [speaking to Fernando] uncle Padrino was there, they were playing together,* "But shut up!" "*What do you mean shut up? That boy has to come to bed!*" "*Shut up, we're coming!*" "*What!?*" She picks up a chair and lifts it up, to hit him with it, right? And Iusun got up and the Padrin *said, "I'll shut up, otherwise..."* And *after some time*, in the morning, he *comes to see us* [at the shoe shop] and, "Ah, then last night Giuseppe you got hit by your wife, didn't you!?" "Yes, sure, *she didn't dare to, because otherwise I would have...*" "No, no you got hit!" "*Eh, well, one needs to play at who's got more judgement.*"

At the end of this story Anna asked "But was Cesira that terrible?" and Maria replied, supported by Alba, with another narrative to explain to Anna how this woman used to be:

22) Eh, when she fought with Maria of Bepp [the daughter of Bepp].

[...] There was the son of this Cesira, who was fond of doves, and they had ended up in the attic of another woman, *that of Bepp*. And so this boy went up to catch them, and this Maria, being convinced that he wanted to steal stuff, hit this child, because she was bigger. *Cesira comes down with the frying pan, she was giving her such blows with the pan! And so, her dad passed by, Bepp. I think it was Vittoria who said to him, "But Bepp, are you not going to separate those two [women]!?" He says, "When the blood arrives down here," he says, "I'll go and separate them."*

Dino. This happened here [he means near his house].

Maria. Yes, they were there.

Dino. They were there at....

Alba. And his daughter said, "What a nice frying pan I have...."

Dino. "Look, they're up there hitting each other with a frying pan", *he says, "That's fine, when the blood arrives here, I ..."*

Maria. *And they were saying to him, "Aren't you going to divide them...?"*

At this point we fall back into conversation, following an interruption for some food and drinks Aldina brings to the table. They remark again that, despite misery, they used to laugh and again Martino says he would want "a film of [their] lives!" Then he asks what I want to know and I say I just want to hear about what they used to do when they did not have a television set.

Alba starts relating of how good her father was at telling stories, even if he had not been able to attend school. Martino remembers his mother and how learned she used to be, despite the fact that she had hardly gone to school. And Martino wishes he could describe the old days.

As they eat, Maria asks for a story about Giuggi, but the request is lost among other remarks and, at this point, Dino introduces a new character.

Something important happens, which will be discussed later: Dino and Martino began to tell stories about Mario, who was present, sitting between Dino and Aldina, and who had been silent up till then. Mario has been unable to interact with people in as lively a way as he used to. He used to be considered by everyone the funniest and wittiest character in the whole village. Dino began to tell this story, with the intention of reviving Mario's memory of the past.

23) And so I tell you one of Mario's [deeds], since he is here and this makes me very happy, right? And so here [inside the room where we all were], you all remember, there was the counter here [there used to be a shop in that room], the sales counter. Here we had cigarettes. It happens that around midday, I never used to come and serve at the counter [he actually gets confused and says 'table'], right? And so, that day I came, and he used to smoke. "Give me a packet of cigarettes," I gave him the cigarettes." When, after having served him, there was a passage to come here, right? *He says*, "Run, run, run," "What is it!?" When I arrived there, *he says*, "Look there is an orang-utan who's captured a little girl." There was Medardo with his daughter, at the window – they had the bars, right?

"But, go away! Aren't you ashamed!?" [said in a friendly tone] Ha, ha, ha! Isn't that true? Can you remember it? [Dino is asking Mario].

And Mario replies "Yes". He smiled and laughed and replied to Dino: "Well Medardo used to say lots of them [witty things] too." At this point, Fernando immediately introduces another story, in the middle of the fading laughter for Mario's story. This story is very recent, but it bears many similarities with Mario's, and speaks of a kind of, apparently cruel humour, very common in the village, which will be dealt with in the next chapter:

24) *And so Alfredino passed by the other day. Well, not the other day, a year ago. He had his tiny grandfather with him. He was walking up the road, he is a bit bent too. He says, "Fernando!" I say, "What's new Alfredino?" He says, "The news is I'm taking the dog for a walk." I was so embarrassed!*⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This was a new story, although in the style of the old ones. I would not be surprised if I were to collect it from Dino or Martino in a year or two.

After this brief anecdote, Dino and Alba went on telling some of Mario's old jokes and punch lines, which Mario was evidently enjoying a lot. He was following everything and laughing quietly. Dino remarks: "Because now he has become a little more silent, but back then!" Most of these stories are very brief and they just consist of a witty or cleverly irreverent remark.

Alba repeats one of Mario's spiciest remarks, and everyone laughs. And Dino tells the last, which involved Giuggi too, where Mario and Giuggi were exchanging witticisms full of references to commonly held and private knowledge.

There was just time to change the video tape in my camera before Fernando began telling another story about Giuggi and "the photograph," after his wife's request, which had come after narrative 12, about the dancing evening:

25) Always Giuggi used to, every Tuesday and Friday, get some mail.

Onelia. That's what *he* used to say.

Martino: From the girls.

F. And so there were two friends of ours, they went to clean in his aunt's house, it was near the Easter Holidays⁴⁶ right, to do some cleaning at Eurosia's. Besides, poor woman, she wasn't beautiful, 'cause, yes, well, was she?

Dino: She was an elderly [woman], old, you know...

F. She had a scarf and one of those long dresses...

And so they measure it [this woman's photograph] with the envelope, but it does not fit into it, they cut it away, they cut her feet. {general laughter}

They put it in the envelope, they find the postman, who was Giuseppe, "*Giuseppe, this evening you must deliver this envelope to Giuggi, because every Tuesday and every Friday he receives...*" "*Yes, I'll take care of it*".

We're there, reciting the rosary, Beppe comes in, "Giuggi, mail [for you]!" And Marcella immediately, "*Keep silent, right? We must recite the rosary, now shut up.*"

Dino. Indeed, "Keep silent, keep silent."

While she says so, he hands him [the envelope], he puts it in his upper pocket. He could not manage to keep silent, he would go, "*Guys!*" "*Shut up Giuggi, or she'll send you out*". He says, "*It's dry,*" {general laughter} because 'it's dry' meant there was something solid [in the envelope], it wasn't only paper. But he could not resist [the temptation], right?

⁴⁶ Spring cleaning is usually referred to as Easter Cleaning in Italy.

Before the litanies, he took the envelope out, very slowly he opened it, he used to stutter a bit, he says, "*It's-it's- V-Vrosia*" {loud general laughter}. *She sent him straight out!* It wasn't a girl, it was that woman there. Maria. She was an elderly woman.

In the fading laughter Martino takes the floor and says: "Well then we must tell about Zurma's funeral":

26) Well then two fiancées, of course, who, who, always this Giuggi, who was supposed to get married with a girl who, who lived a few miles away from here, right?

Onelia. *That's what he used to say!*

Martino. *No, no, it was true.*

Everyone. Yes, yes, they were supposed to get married.

Martino. Well, anyway, *he used to say...* And so the news arrives that this girl has died. She's dead. And so this Giuggi is all...{Alba. Broken-hearted.}...yes, broken-hearted, and busy preparing to go to the funeral, and there was her brother, this lady's brother [he holds Anna's arm who is sitting next to him].

Anna. Sesto.

Martino. Sesto, and Giuggi's sister who was Sesto's girlfriend. And so they decide to go to the funeral – Giuggi, Sesto and the sister. And so they go to look for black suits, ha, ha, ha, because they had to dress for...And so I had a black suit, all black right? And he came to borrow it, Giuggi. And for Sesto they went to Pellegrino {everyone laughs}. It's true, this is the truth, eh! And they borrow this suit, and they get ready, Dina too, all dressed in...{Everyone. In black!}...in black, and Giuggi says, "*Sesto, take the rosary beads with you.*" {everyone laughs wholeheartedly} And so they leave, they catch the coach, because in those days they didn't have cars. They go to the coach, when they get there, there is a lady from Frassinoro, Santina, *she says*, "*Where are these two seminarians going?*" {general laugh} They were dressed in black, two seminarists, because in those days the seminarians were dressed in black. Giuggi says, "*Eh, we are going to a funeral.*" {general laugh} Eh, and having said so, they carry on and they go. Then the coach drove until a certain point and then one had to...

Fernando. Go on foot.

M. Go on foot. There was a passage which you had to walk along. And so, they leave, they go on foot, and midday strikes.

M.M. The [church] bells.

M. The bells that were striking midday. Giuggi says, "Here comes the Hail Mary {everyone laughs}. Sesto, take the [rosary] beads out, so we can say the rosary." {everyone laughs wholeheartedly} And then, they walk to the house because..., this girl's house.

Fernando. This Zurma.

M. When they get there, after having said the rosary and everything, they meet the father, right? *And so they introduce themselves, well, "We are very sorry about what happened, about this tragedy", anyway, all like this. And he says, he says, "Look," he says, "the calf," he says, "we've lost it," he says, "but we saved the cow."*

From the general laughter, we move back into conversation. They ask me if there is anything I want to know. I ask what they used to do in the evenings and they start telling of the *veglia* and of the nights they were all told tales and stories in the barns. Martino tries to remember a few, but all he can remember are the titles. Then they move to summer nights, and to remembering the songs they used to sing, in all parts of the village. They begin to sing together. At this point, Mario remarks that "we should speak about the rhymes as well," of which he was one of the main authors. And Aldina takes the floor, reciting one of the rhymes she had learned by heart, after having read it on the sheets that were attached to the light pole by the fountain. Then Fernando tells a rhyme that was written about him and his wife, when they were still engaged and which he had never forgotten.

Maria leaves and there is another interruption. The session opens again, with Fernando telling another short story of a funny thing that was done by the "boys" of the old days.

27) There was Nildo, there was Bepi, there was the whole gang. *He says, "Guys, let's go and see the girls going to bed." "And how will we manage?" "Eh," he says, "we go on top of the willow tree." Ismino says, "I go first."*

Aldina. *At the [cà] di Lazarin?*

Fernando: *Yes, there at the cà d'Marcello. There was a ditch for the cows. And he goes up, up, he says, "Let me go," he says, "from here I can see really well." And so, they all wanted to go where they could see well. Up they go, up they go, the branch gets over-laden. With two [people], it could still stay up, but when four arrive, the branch breaks and we all fall into the water.*

I didn't end up into the water, but Sesto, Ismino, "Oh my God..." [actually a blasphemy]. And they didn't see anything, anyway, right?

At this point, I am replying to a question from Anna, who is sitting next to me. Fernando, in the meantime, tells another story, a brief punch line regarding Giuggi. He was telling this just for his friends and certainly not for me. Then more punch lines of Giuggi and, since Dino remarks he remembers that one was told when they were at the cinema one night, we end up talking of the cinema in Frassinoro, and when the first films arrived and were projected on the main wall of the Village Hall, while the people sat outside, in the square. They laughed, remembering one particular film being shown upside-down, as the man in charge was not an expert.

From cinema, we moved back to talking of feelings of unity and solidarity among the villagers in the old days. To support this, Martino tells of how the young people used to include his cousin who had learning disabilities in everything they did, and they tell stories about him, most of which however, reveal what Dino remarks: "they also took advantage of him [his condition]." However, Aurelio, this was Martino's cousin name, was teased without malice:

28) He was my cousin, right? And so on the first day of the year, he goes with his sister, he had a sister, to wish a Happy New Year to my mother, right? And so my mother *says, she says*, "Now that [you have come around], I want to give you two," because she had home made liquors, all then..., they made them by hand...

Fernando. They were 'manual'.

Martino. *She says*, "I want to give you the best one" [loud general laughter]. And so she goes to the cupboard, there were some bottles, she takes one bottle and she pours two glasses for the sister and this handicapped boy. And so, the handicapped boy swallows it, you know, and the sister says, "But, good God, *what did you give me [to drink] aunt?*"

"Oh, my God!" She had given them rennet [to drink], you know the one they use to make the milk curdle? {general laughs}

Alba. It used to smell so bad!

Martino. And so we guys, when we heard the news, "*Let's go and see if Aurelio has curdled*" {laugh}.

"Eh, it was a comedy, those were the laughs we had." Then Fernando tells another joke about Martino's cousin, and Martino goes on to tell another one about Giuggi:

29) I'll tell you one, the last one. Yes, because he used to be a dentist too, in the wartime....

Aldina. Yes, he was a barber, he was a dentist...

Martino. Yes, yes, he did all kinds of jobs. And so there's a man here, a pious man {they all laugh and Alba turns towards the others and silently says, "Santi", which, ironically, was the man's actual surname} goes to see Giuggi, 'cause he had a sore tooth. [He] says, "*Giuggi, you must take this tooth of mine out.*" He says, "*Right, sit there Santi,*" he says, "*'cause I'll fetch the pliers*" {loud general laughter}. And so, the man sits, Giuggi arrives with the jaw, when he appears with the pliers, he does the sign of the Cross...He says, "*I'm not the devil, right!?*" {general laughter}

Immediately following this, half way through the laughter, Fernando starts:

30) Another time, - this [the previous story] is the dentist - [now] the barber, right?

L. Giuggi the barber?

F. Giuggi the barber who goes around to my uncle's house, Angioletto. And so he says, "*What shall we do? Shall we do the hair?*" He says, "*The hair and the beard [a shave] too.*" And so he cuts his hair, then he shaves him, he gets here [he points at his chin], here it is difficult with the blade, right? Well, he stops for a while, he says, "*Do you know Angioletto that a goat beard would suit you?*" {general laugh}}

Dino. Because he had made a mistake, right?

Fernando. He says, "*Please, please, don't you go about finding excuses. I'll keep my moustache, but the goat beard...!*" "*Do as I tell you, keep the goat beard 'cause it suits you.*"

Dino. "*He [Angioletto] got angry,*" he [Giuggi] says, "*but I did not finish shaving him!*"

Then Martino steps in quickly, "Now I'll tell you the last one of Giuggi...." And goes on to tell a story about him and a few girls in Corsica, where Giuggi was working, harvesting grapes. Again another story consisting of a punch line, and strongly dependent on the informants' shared knowledge. We get into a discussion about the importance of laughter for them in those days, "*Importantissimo!*" and they

react by describing its opposites: the misery, the tragedy, the poverty, the emptiness of those days. Fernando tells of a conversation between his father and a warrant-officer of the *Carabinieri*⁴⁷, to explain the level of hunger they suffered:

For example, for example, my father. There was a warrant-officer of the *carabinieri*, my father was a common house guard⁴⁸. He [the warrant officer] says, he says, "Fratti [he gets called by his surname], what happens in your house" – we were eight of us brothers – when your wife cooks *polenta*?"

"Oh well," he says, "nothing happens. She pours the *polenta* [on the tray] and the smoke has not even reached the floor, when there is none [of the *polenta*] left!"

This story reminded Dino of a story about another *carabiniere*, which Fernando used to tell. Dino says, "Tell instead, the one about the *brigadiere* [staff sergeant] who used to make love to the wife of that man." Fernando begins:

31) Eh, that one is funny. It was [about] a wife who cheated on her husband. The husband used to work at the dam, you know...

Everyone. In Fontanaluccia.

Fernando. And that's fine, and this husband was told, "Look, your wife is having an affair with the *brigadiere* of the *carabinieri*." "I can't believe it. I can't believe it." He says, "Try this," they used to work night shift, *he says*, "tonight, instead of going to work, just pretend you are going and then come back here."

And indeed, he comes to Casagianasi, he comes back and he goes home, he sees the light in the bedroom. The door was opened, he goes up and he finds them both there. "Oh, you must forgive me!" "No, no, no excuses, nothing". "I wanted to go to the window, because..." "No, no, you calm down, and you the same. You, however, get dressed, put on socks and shoes," *he says*, "and then," "But please, you must forgive me, I did nothing but..." "I don't want to know anything. You get dressed." He gets dressed, he climbs on a trunk, *he says*, "Now," *he* [the man] *says*, "climb on my

⁴⁷ A branch of the Italian army which acts as a police force, with roughly the same functions as the police. In Frassinoro they did not have Police, but only the Carabinieri. It must also be noted that, jokes about the silly Carabinieri used to be among the most widespread jokes in Italy.

⁴⁸ This was not at all a well paid job. However, they could at least avoid emigrating.

back." They were in the bedroom, there was a little staircase, right. While going down, "But," *he says*, "but no, but no," "No, no," and he climbs on his back.

And he walks down [the stairs] and he comes out, still with this man on his back, right? And they *get to a point where there was...* He says, "Listen, do you have any cigarettes?" He says, "*Now he'll kill me.*" "Smoke a cigarette." He smokes a cigarette, "Have you finished?" "Yes," "Jump up." Go, go, go, go, he arrives in Pietravolta, like this we keep it shorter.

There was an ugly place, there is a precipice there. "Get off." *He says*, "*This time really will kill me.*" All during the night, right? "Have you got any cigarettes?" He says, "I've still got two," "Smoke a cigarette". He waits, he smokes a cigarette, "Are you finished?", "Yes", "Get up". He gets back up and go, go, go, go, they arrive at San Pellegrino.

Aldina. Mamma mia.

Fernando. "*Eh,*" *he says*, "*here for sure, in such an isolated place....*"

Dino. "It's the end."

Fernando. "Well then have you still got any cigarettes?" *He says*, "I've still got one." "Smoke the cigarette. With calm and tranquillity." This guy had began to feel scared, right? And so, he finishes the cigarette, *he says*, "Now I must tell you something," the *brigadiere* inside of him was saying, "Now he'll kill me and that's it." "No, no, don't worry," *he says*, "Look, if I find you with my wife," he says, "this time I took you here, the next time I'll take you to Castelnovo." [general laughter].

And there it ended....

Aldina. What a satisfaction, carrying him on his back.

This is the last narrative of the session, they then decide to "let her [me] go, or we'll keep her here all night". They all had their homes to go back to. And it was in their homes, visiting them as couples, that I collected the following stories, and other versions of the ones above, at various times, when I went back to the village between and after each group interview.

The next two stories were collected a few days after the first group interview, from Anita, who had been unable to join the group earlier. I went to meet her and her husband, Ariosto, in their house next to the Badia. Anita was cooking *polenta* in the old way, in a copper cauldron, stirring vigorously with a long wooden spoon.

She told me these stories in the kitchen, after having wiped her hands in her apron, standing by the cooker. The first story plays with the double meaning of the

word *piano*, which can have the function of an adverb, thus meaning ‘slowly’, as well as an adjective, in which case it means ‘flat’. During her time in service in Pisa, her mistress asked her once to bring a *piatto piano*, lit. flat plate, a plate, to the living room. *Piatto piano* was the Tuscan way of calling what is normally referred to as *piatto pari*, another word for ‘flat’, which also means ‘even’. Not knowing what the *piatto piano* was, since for her all dishes were *piatt*, without defining adjectives, the girl Anita interprets the word *piano* with the only meaning she uses it with, ‘slowly’.

I leave the expression *piatto piano* here, as this allows us to understand the pun:

32) “Bring the **piatto piano**.” Fine then, *I take my piatto*, in the end. **Piatto piano** and then I went [she mimes the action of walking very slowly holding the plate in her hands] *But it must have taken me four minutes* [to go] from the living room to the kitchen. **Piatto piano**. “Can’t you hurry up?!” [said with Tuscan accent] She was a Tuscan, “Hurry up!” “Signora, I’m coming, I’m coming.” But dear my **piatto piano**.

This other story plays with assonance. The word *capperi*, capers, is replaced with *cazzeri*, which does not exist, but which strongly recalls a rude swear word referring to male genitals, which is nowadays used without fear, but which a girl in Anita’s days would have never uttered. However, as will be explained in Chapter 5, I doubt that the word was used among girls in Frassinoro, at the time these events took place:

33) And another time, she sends me to do grocery shopping, she would tell me – because as I told you, I was thirteen years old, leaving the village, where you spoke like this, our own way*At the end of the song* [meaning, to make a long story short], she says, “You must go to this grocer’s and buy some **capperi**”. And I go, “Yes, yes, that’s fine” “I’ll write a little note for you.” And I kept saying, “No, signora, don’t write it. I will remember it”. Fine then. I go down [to the shop], my turn comes, this grocer says to me, “Hello little girl, what do you want?” I remained a bit vacant and then I said, “I want twenty-five grams of **cazzeri**!” *I wish I had never said that!* And this guy, with a big belly, was laughing, together with two other guys. I didn’t know why. I went home and I was so upset that I said, “How ignorant these people of Pisa are!” “What did they do to you?” “Well”, I say, “nothing, I asked him for **cazzeri**...” “But, Anita, what have you said? It’s not

cazzeri. Capperi! “Well,” I say, “I wanted twenty-five grams of them!” Oh, God, God, God, how embarrassing!

During the group interview, none of these women’s stories had come up. Some women had told stories, but those were part of a shared repertoire which had long been the man’s repertoire. The only two stories created by women were told by a man, Giacobbe. And if Alba, in the second group interview, was relatively comfortable telling men’s stories she had heard in the shoe shop, she did not tell stories about her own experience, not spontaneously.

Because of Anita’s stories, I asked other women if they used to tell stories about their life in Florence and Anna told me the following two narratives in June 2006. The first (narrative 34), which is very similar to the ones Anita told, plays on another misunderstanding – this time caused by a familiar word, which, however, corresponds to a completely different object in the city. The word *paletto* meant something precise to Anna, a small shovel, the length of a kitchen wooden spoon, which used to be used for gathering flour. To her mistress however, it meant ‘door bolt’, which is its current meaning in standard Italian.

34) For example I [had a problem with] the **paletto**. The **paletto** of the door, I thought it was the **paletto**, the one used for gathering flour.

My mistress says, “when it [the door bell] rings, come down and put the **paletto** [not to bolt the door, but actually to prevent the door from closing], you know what it is?”

I say, “Of course!” I look for the **paletto**, but I could not find it. And sure enough I went down, the door closed itself [behind me], I had the children in the apartment, it was pandemonium! But I was looking for this **paletto**. What could I know...?

Mario. The one for gathering flour.

A. Eh, she, “Do you know what it is?” “Right,” I say, “of course I know!” And instead it’s the **paletto** of the door, *the bolt so to speak, what’s it called?* Well, such [nonsense] things [used to happen]! Yes, and especially back then.

In 2006 I also went to visit Martino and his wife a few times. Some of the stories of the group interview were repeated and others were told that I had not heard before.

Here is a female story Alba told me, while Martino was in the kitchen, making coffee:

35) There was a [girl] that had been away in..., in the city. And so she had come, she used to give herself airs. And so when she came back home, she says, ha, ha, ha, "Wha-What is this?" It was a rake, lying on the ground...and so...

L. Eh, was she acting as if she did not recognise it?

M.M As if she did not know what it was. And as she was walking, ha, ha, ha, she stepped on it, the rake went [she mimes the rake hitting the girl's forehead] it hit her like this, ha, ha, ha, she says "*Damn' rake!*" [we both laugh] "*Then you know what it is!*" Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha...!

Martino came back and Alba told me another story:

36) Once they went to dance, him [her husband Martino] and Ismino went to dance, in Spervara⁴⁹.

Martino. No, there were four or five of us.

Alba. Four or five in a room like this [she mimes a very small room⁵⁰]. And so they go in and there was music. *And so they say*, "Let's go and grab a girl, right, there were two or three sitting down, ha, ha, ha, and so he says, "I take this one and you take *the other one*." And so they go and grab these girls to go dancing. And then they were big! [tall]

Martino. Yes, but it's true, a big [tall] girl!

Alba. And so, she was grabbing him from here [his collar], and so they [his friends] would say to him...ha, ha, ha! They begin to dance and they say, "*Angiul*," because they used to call each other like this, *they say*, "*how's it going?*" He says, "If I can put my feet on the ground, I will never dance again with her!" [Alba, at the end of this line, can hardly breathe because of how much she's laughing!]

More stories were recounted that day, all of which were versions of previously collected ones.

Following the visit to Alba and Martino, I went to see Dino and Aldina, who were also hosting me for the night that time. In the evening we had plenty of time to chat. As we chatted about tricks, Dino told the following two stories, which are most

⁴⁹ A smaller village, a few kilometres away from Frassinoro.

⁵⁰ Not that Alba had ever seen that particular room, but she assumed so, given that that was what used to happen in Frassinoro, where they often had to take turns to dance, given how small the rooms were.

interesting as they show that the spirit of trickery followed the Frassinoresi beyond the village. The first story tells of events of the *Macchia*:

37) Well, they used to have fun.

D. And so, now, since we're here, opposite here there used to live a man who was older [than me].

A. That's a good one too.

D. Eh?

A. That's a good one too.

D. There was one, there was, whose name was Arnaldo [...] You know, they were full of life... [...] And so it happens that he was the cook, right? And so, generally, they would build the hut near a stream, you know, to have water, not so much to wash, but... to make *polenta*.

And so, this Arnaldo had bought some *baccalà* (dry and very salted cod), you know, and then he had tied it by the tail, the *baccalà*, and he had put it in this stream, to clean it naturally.

And so they thought, he says, "*We must play a trick, play Arnaldo a trick, right?*" Because they had no- [regards]. And so they said, "Now we cut the rope Arnaldo used", right, "and then we replace it with a longer rope." Have you understood? And so they did so, "Arnaldo! The *baccalà* is going away!" He left as quick, as quick as the wind – the water reached just up to here [he points to the waist], you know...

A. In the meantime, they let it go, on purpose, and the *baccalà* was going further and further away.

L. [laugh]

D. When he catches the *baccalà*, he saw it was tied. You can imagine, 'cause, 'cause he always used to say "*Io bestrega!*" [innocuous imprecation]

{We laugh}

He says, "*Look at what they could plot!*" He was all wet...Ha, ha, ha!

[...] You see, they used to have fun, that's it. A sketch, let's say, would come out [of such situations], a joke like, out of nothing.

A. And then, when they came back home, they [would tell that] they had done this, they had done that, they laughed, like that.

Following the days of the *Macchia*, Dino told of another trick played by his father during the years they both spent in Algeria:

38) Eh! They were looking forward to it, because we weren't just the two of us there, right? There were four of us from the area of Montefiorino⁵¹ and four from the area of Frassinoro. And so what did they use to do? There was one whose name was Ludovico – just to tell [a story]..., it's almost a joke, right? He says, this Ludovico was so good, that they used to say, "Now we go to the bar," right, "and then we begin with the issue of Frassinoro against Montefiorino, and vice versa. Like that, without doubts, Ludovico will intervene and he will buy a crate of wine." And that did use to happen. They would agree with the owner of the..., of the inn let's say, of the bar. They would say, "Look, we'll do this and this, but we don't [really] quarrel!" It seems like they're fighting, you know, they used to do it on purpose, they would get to a certain point where they would say, "No, stop now, it's time to stop, right? How's this? *What need is there for Frassinoro to quarrel with those of the commune of Montefiorino?*" [this was Ludovico speaking]

A. And he [Ludovico] used to buy them all drinks, to make them stop quarrelling.

After these stories, we moved back to the village and Dino spoke again of the people that had been recalled in the group interview of nearly a year before. Now I knew those characters and he liked to tell me the same stories again and a few new ones. Here is one about Iusun:

39) He liked playing *briscola* a lot, he was completely bald. And so his wife was looking for him, naturally she could not find him. And she ended up in that little bar there, and there was a kitchen – he was playing with another man, he was completely bald, right? – she opened the door, and the thing is that the door opened just so that it hid the husband a bit. When she, she saw her husband, she gave him such a slap on his head! Ha, ha, ha!

A. And he was saying "*Is this a good one* [the card he was playing]?" – you know when you play – and so she said to him, "*And this one* [the slap], *is this a good one?*".

D. *Ha, ha, ha. Yes, it's true!*

From Iusun, we moved to Giuggi, as a natural leap:

⁵¹ Lit. "comune di Montefiorino". Montefiorino is a village below Frassinoro, which, although smaller in the past, is now the chief village of the area, and Frassinoro is now dependent on its council as far as administration and the main public services are concerned.

40) Whenever we used to organise something, Giuggi would always come around too. "And so, so have you come with the ham?" What was the ham? It was the violin [here Dino refers to the typical shape of a whole cured ham]

[interruption]

No, well, but then I tell you about Giuggi, right? And so it happens that a dinner is organised, you know, among all of us, there were the women too, right!?

[...]

And so I said to him, to Giuggi right, "But, have you got the ham with you?" He says, "Indeed I have got it, in the car!" But there was Fernando's brother, who could play really well the accordion. He used to play [a second of silence during which he moves his hand and arm in front of himself, a gesture currently used to say 'wonderfully'] but he used to play [in such a wonderful way that] I cannot begin to tell you. His name was Davide. And so I, ...eh...., because me too I am, I like to play my role— not as a musician — I went up to Davide and I say, "Davide, please, stop playing all of a sudden, right, 'cause we want to hear Giuggi playing a solo." *He says...*, and sure enough they were playing, and Giuggi had his music in front of him, right. I say, "First of all, Giuggi, you must turn the sheet round, because it is upside down," because then...*He says*, "Oh, but even if it's turned this way, it's the same for me," because he couldn't [read the music] Ha, ha, ha...

"To me, if it is turned this way, it's the same."

"Then go on as you like." At a certain point, Davide, the accordion, stops all of a sudden, right? And so we heard: "chiii, chiii, chiii [he makes an unpleasant high pitch noise] You can imagine how much we laughed.

But he [Giuggi] wouldn't take it amiss, he wasn't upset, ha, ha, ha, no!

Another story I collected from Dino in those days was very interesting because it had been told by a woman, an elderly lady, at the time Dino was a young man. This woman was considered extremely witty and entertaining by the young men:

41) But then *I'll tell you* another one. And so *it happens that there was a woman*, whose name was Lucetta, Lucetta and she had, she had married a man whose name was....eh...[he is thinking of the name and gets upset because he suddenly cannot remember it]...eh, eh,....

A. Ah, I don't know if I can recall it.

D. There you go, you see, everything finishes [they laugh].
To conclude, anyway, they went to sleep in the corridor, you know. There were the stairs, and then there was a bit of corridor, and they put the bed there.

A. What an amnesia.

D. Sibò.

A. Sibò, yes.

[...]

And so, she used to tell, she used to say. Back then *we had beds, right*, [made] with corn leaves, you know. And then we had the feathers.

A. Back then, with chicken feathers we used to make mattresses, because there wasn't any wool.

D. We did not use to have the woollen mattress, you know, and so on...

A. No, no, no, they did it with the feather, the hen feather. Not the goose feather, as those were...[too expensive]. The hen feather, they made these quilts and put them underneath.

D. And so, she was an extremely entertaining woman, who spoke Tuscan, when it was the [appropriate] moment⁵²

"When [he mimes her voice], when we woke up [he tries a Tuscan accent], *she says*, "it looked like a hen house," *she says*, "*all the feathers had come out*," *she says*, "*they were everywhere*."

A. "*They were flying everywhere*."

D. "*They were flying everywhere*," *she says*. Ha, ha, ha! {We all laugh}

But to hear it from an old lady, do you understand? Eh, we used to stop here, outside here look, like this [he points to the street outside his house] ...

L. And so you were teenagers?

D. No, already, we were already men, men let's say. After the war, right.

L. Was she your parent's age?

A. Oh, yes, yes, if not even older.

In June 2006 I also went to visit, for the first time, a man who was to become my only young informant, Fabio Turrini, Fao, as he is known in the village. Fao (36) grew up with the elderly. He was among the last of his age to tend the cows and live a childhood similar to that of the past generations. Though new influences were quickly and relentlessly finding their way into the village, most of his day, up to the age of fifteen, was spent with the animals and in the fields. The thing he used to

⁵² Many of the most famous comedians in Italy are from Tuscany. The Tuscan accent is very suitable for comedy and Lucetta probably realised its effectiveness already back then.

enjoy most of all was paying visits to the old folks, and getting them to tell him traditional tales, when he was a child, and later 'man' stories, when he grew up. Maybe because of this contact he had with the older generation, Fao is considered by all my informants as some kind of heir of the old ways. Fao met Giuggi and grew very fond of this old man whom he considered a "real signore [gentleman]." Here are two stories Fao used to be told by Giuggi, in his barber's shop, in the days Fao was sent for a hair cut by his mother:

42) And he [Giuggi] used to tell them⁵³ about himself. Because when I would go there to have my hair cut, he used to say that he was going to the Europa Palace [a commercial area in Modena] to take...[a course], I mean, he pretended he was a real hairdresser, right? Barber, violinist, everything. I remember, he had the shop where Elio's bar is now, where Nanda lives, the shop was there. And my mother used to take me there to have my hair cut, which by the way was a torture, because he used to take your hair like this [he mimes Giuggi pulling his hair strongly], and then would start cutting. "I've been to the Europa Palace to attend a course for hairdressers. At the end *do you know what the professors said?* 'You, Mr. Ferrari, should be teaching us!'" He used to tell me this. And he knew it wasn't true. But he used to enjoy himself [telling the story], and he always told this story to everyone. "You should be teaching us, and not we you." Boh! And so he did his bit of pruning, which cost almost nothing. You would leave and he would not wait for the next customer, he would, he would go to the bar once again, to tell two **balle** to Beppe, and then he would come back here, and there you go.

43) The great thing about Giuggi was that he used to try hard. Once he dug potatoes, he went to dig potatoes for a guy who was elderly, and there you go. Only, instead of going – there is the potato fork, you know, which is made with two teeth, right? – he went with the spade. Only, the spade, every time it caught a potato, it cut it. In the end – but there were ten, fifteen kilos of potatoes – there were more than three quarters of them which were cut in the middle, they had to be thrown away. He picked them up, just the smallest, the ones he had picked up with the spade, and he said to him, "*Well, I have*

⁵³ "Them" refers to *balle*, lit. 'lies', of which I will speak in the next chapter.

done my best. I cannot do more than this,” which meant he had managed to cut all of them!

3.2 Classifying the corpus.

The people did not have a “formal title” for these stories (Bauman 1986: 55), or even a non-sentence definition. The people refer to the stories above as to “that of”, *quella di*, which, being a feminine pronoun, is likely to stand for *storia*, “story,” also feminine. However, when asking the people what they would call the stories in this corpus, they had difficulties defining them, as if they did not think of them as a genre. Although sometimes they used terms to define a few of them, and although I can guess that other stories in this corpus can belong to the same genre, I have not had any clear indications from them of the categories into which they would put each story.

The only sure term is *scherzo* (lit. trick), which is the equivalent of a practical joke. Practical jokes were the most common source of humorous narratives and they were mostly a male genre. The community expected them and looked forward to new ones. *Scherzi* fall into the description of practical jokes given by Bauman, as what makes them practical is that “They involve fabrication of part of the extraverbal world, though words might be among the means employed to effect the trickery” (Bauman 1986: 36).

Most of the stories could be referred to loosely as *partita* (lit. match), or *partida*, in the dialect. *Partida* is used in many dialects of Emilia Romagna as ‘story’ (the word *partita*, in standard Italian, is rarely used with this meaning). “*Essere della partita*” means ‘to be one of the party’. I do not exclude that the habit of using the word *partita* for stories might be due to a sort of synecdoche, whereby a part of something, such as ‘the adventure of a party of people,’ is referred to with the whole, ‘party.’ Regardless of its origin, *partida* today does convey a feeling of adventure, but it is normally used for a story, one which is not frightening, therefore not a *paura*, and not *impossibile*, therefore not a *folia* (lit. folktale).⁵⁴

Cuntem la partida, in the dialect, equals “What’s the story”. The *partida* is a narrative, and often a narrative of personal experience. A humorous anecdote can be

⁵⁴ See Appendix 1 for full definition of the term as meant by the villagers.

a *partida* too, regardless of its length. Even a short anecdote relying mostly on the punch-line was sometimes referred to as *partida*, although the impression is that the *partida* relies more on actions than on words. Dino referred to narrative 37 as a “sketch” (the English word is used in Italian to mean a comic sketch). It is interesting that this brings the visual side of the practical joke out and Dino possibly visualised it as a stage comic, almost like a sketch by Ridolini (from the verb *ridere*, ‘to laugh’; this is how the silent film comedian Larry Semon was known in Italy). In it, the verbal part was nearly absent, and the actions of frantically chasing the fish tied to the rope were what made the story.

However, many of the stories above rely almost exclusively on punch-lines, they are punch-line jokes. Dino once referred to them as *battuta*, lit. punch-line. This hardly implies the use of a metonymy, since the *battuta* is often the main part of the anecdote, and not a part of a whole. The *battuta* is a particularly loved genre in the village and people repeat the final lines with care.

Martino referred to the stories that owe their comic effect to an unlucky event as *disavventura* (misadventure):

M. Well, practically, the little stories, to me they remain within the village environment, these, these adventures, misadventures...

I find the term very appropriate as it contains within it an idea of comic, or of very light misfortune. I would not apply the term *disavventura* to a real tragedy for example. You can call it this only if you are in a position to speak of it with a relatively light heart. In Frassinoro, *disavventure* could be accidents that had happened and were narrated in a humorous key:

Because you see, we would tell, for example, I don't know, one had had..., I don't know, some things, let's say some problems at work, he is in trouble at work. And so we would say, “That guy's mule has fallen, and has turned his cart upside down,” I don't know. It was all things like that, because in those days we did not have a television set and all those...And so we used to meet up in a group...”

In this case the narratives had not been passed on, but were exchanged on the day and maybe for a few days afterwards. These narratives had the life and duration of news, and not of stories.

Then Martino uses *avventura* for the other stories, which is very similar to *partita*. However, when referring to the stories as he told them, Martino never used these terms and always used *quella di*, or at times *storiella* (lit. little story). The term contains in itself a reference to the shortness of the story, which also implies that it is something with little importance.

In general, because all the stories above contain very little truth, and because they are all humorous, and because they are considered to have little importance, one could call them all *balle* (lit. 'lie' or 'fabrication'), a term which I used in the interviews, and which no one objected to. From this lack of objections I gathered that they have seen many of the stories in the corpus as *balle* too. The fabrication does not necessarily go in the direction of boasting, so the *balla* is not always a tall tale. On the contrary, it is often a self-disparaging narrative. The *balla* is what many folklorists have come upon. It is still very much in use, and the definition of it that I report below, was given to me by my youngest informant, Fabio Turrini. *Balla* is literally a funny lie. Indeed I asked Fabio if lie and *balla* differed (I leave here the word *bugia*, which is the usual word for 'lie', so that the difference can be understood):

Very much, very much! The *bugia* is almost always said with a purpose. And anyway it is used to justify, it is used to hide [something].

The *balla*, as I think of it, is something you throw there, which is a mix, it's like a legend, but not even that, it's like the Odyssey. Where maybe there is some truth, but you tell it just to tell something.

[...]

The *bugia*, there are people who know how to tell *bugie*, they construct them beforehand, they do not make them up [on the spot]. The *bugia* must be constructed [fabricated]. I tell you, I thought about this a couple of years ago. I know people who can tell *bugie*.

The *balla* is a farce, it is something that is said just to say something, to pass the time, but it has no purpose, it does not hit on anything anyway, it does not hurt anyone, everything is

ok [after the *balla* has been told]. But in the meantime things go on.⁵⁵

What is clear in Fabio's definition is that the *balla* allows one to interact, to facilitate interaction, to pass the time, to make things go on as he says. It facilitates the smoothness of the social fabric, and this is exactly what these stories did. They allowed interaction and social harmony. However, the *balla* could be very vague and was not necessarily about real people known by everyone.

This brought me to reconsider the term as a possible name for the stories in the corpus. And it is interesting that those who told me the stories in the corpus never used this term, as if it were reductive for stories which often displayed great wit and which were about real people who were likely to behave in the way they had behaved in the story, thus suggesting that the story was 'true'.

3.3 Authors and tellers.

The informants confirmed later that the concentration of humorous narratives during the second group interview was not an isolated case, but was the norm when adults met. With a few exceptions, the stories were told by men. They were

⁵⁵ What Fabio said is very similar to what Glassie's informant in Ballymanone said when asked about 'pants' and lies. Here is what Glassie wrote:

[...] I commented that I had also heard pants called lies, and he told me a bid, a story upon stories, to explain the problem.

"Aye."

"There was someone at one time and he asked a clergyman was it a sin to tell lies.

"And the clergyman replied.

"It depended on the source of the lie that you told.

"If you told a lie that would injure your neighbour, that would be a sin.

"Or that would spread any kind of scandal or anything like that.

"But he said,

"The lie that no one would believe

There was no harm telling that lie.

"Aye."

"A thing that no one would believe".

Then I defined a pant as a "harmless lie" and Mr. Nolan agreed. Pants differ radically from other lies in intentions, in "source". The lie that is not a pant is inherently evil and brings harm to the neighbor. The lie that is a pant brings no harm to the self and helps the neighbor. The pant's good intention is displayed in clear incredibility. A pant is not a lie, precisely because, as Mr. Nolan said, "you'd know before it was fully told that it was a lie" (Glassie 1982: 57-59).

exchanged among peers, i.e. men who were not in a hierarchical relationship. The interviews following the group ones dealt mostly with questions about the stories in this corpus and about when they used to be told. They confirmed that those were the stories men used to tell each other, whenever they had an occasion to meet. As Martino explained:

Yes, practically we were a group, a group that met on all occasions let's say, during the free moments we had, we always had our meetings, and there we would talk and dance...

The group Martino refers to was particularly active immediately after the War, when Martino and most of my informants were in their early twenties. Among my informants, Mario, Dino and Fernando were also part of that group. With them, there were many other men, most of whom are unfortunately no longer alive. Their names are in the stories: Giuggi, above all, and Iusun. This group of men was the heart of the "company", most of the time, with their production of stories. They were the witty and self-ironical people, the witty and sarcastic people, those with an eye for comic situations, whether in their lives or in the lives of others. They were the funny crowd of the village: everyone in the village knew their jokes or, *storielle*, little stories.

As soon as they were told in the village, these stories could be repeated by anybody, and also in the presence of the author. The author never held onto the stories, which became part of the community repertoire as soon as they were spoken, because telling was a gift to the community and stories were considered to be for public use. They were very similar to what Glassie found were the stories of the so called "stars". Stars were men:

"whose wit got them through. While they are remembered, their personality discussed, their deeds related, tonight's ceiliers recreate the stars' creations, reusing their genius, working tales of two types smoothly into the chat and elevating it clearly into entertainment (Glassie 1982: 43-44).

Studies of personal narratives, so far, have looked at them as part of the personal repertoire of the person, who carries that repertoire around with him and adapts it to

audiences. But these humorous stories in Frassinoro were carried around by the people, who could tell them and owned them.

All the stories in our corpus are a social repertoire, which circulated among men and to which stories were added all the time.

It is evident from the texts presented in the previous chapter that all the stories in the group interview were told not by their original authors, but by their friends. However, the interviewees had been telling these stories for years, even when the authors were alive. Martino said they used to “look forward to collecting one of these [stories],” so as to be able to tell it to everyone else. And Dino, at the end of one story, among the general laughter, turned to me and said: “And we all used to laugh, and then we would always retell it to the whole village!” There are many other comments that echo these. Even if the stories were told as personal narratives by the author-protagonist, the authors enjoyed hearing them from others and did not mind changes, as long as the stories were well told.

I once asked Dino:

L. And then you would tell them again yourselves?

D. Then yes we would!

L. But also in front of him?[the author]

D. Also [in front of] him, he used to laugh too!

Also, if his stories had started off as a self-ironical personal narrative, the author did not mind hearing them told by others, although technically this meant being laughed at.

The stories were often told in Martino’s shoe shop. As Maria once commented, “To find good chats and gossip, one had to go to the barber’s, to the hairdresser’s and to the shoemaker’s.” The places for humour were very much the ones for gossip too, and the two are sometimes closely intertwined.

The shoemaker Martino and his wife, who used to spend most of her day working in the shop with him, were among the people I met and interviewed most often. Their shop was a meeting point for men and many of the humorous anecdotes I collected from Martino, Dino, Mario and others, were learned and exchanged there. Here is how Martino and his wife describe those days in the shop:

Alba: Martino and his brother worked. Where they worked, the men would come to visit them, those who were not working, especially in winter time, they would come and spend half a day there or a morning. And they would tell each other [stories] and laugh.

Martino: From there, all the news of the day started! Ha, ha, ha... 'That one has a cow that has done this....', ' We went to harvest here and there...' In the morning we had all the news in the village. Ha, ha, ha...

Alba. Then they used to put together the government and destroy it again! [an expression signifying that they acted as though they knew more than anyone else and had solutions for everything]! So many discussions! Ha, ha, ha!

The shop was a meeting point especially after the war, when the men began to be able to spend the winter in the village. Mario had by then been able to live off his work as a mason, Dino had come back from Algeria for good and had taken over his father's shop, as a carpenter. They had all married and their women were at home, with the children. The shoemaker's shop could then act as a meeting point, because they were all in the village and also because they did not go to the bar yet. It was only in the sixties and seventies that the bar began to be frequented by the majority of the people who would enjoy a game of cards.

The other place where people would stop for a chat and to hear a good piece of 'news', or fiction, was Giuggi's barber shop. While giving his famous haircuts, Giuggi used to relate to his 'victims' the story of the day he was given his diploma as a hairdresser in Modena.

Other places for these stories were on the street, as Dino says in narrative 41, when telling me about the lady who used to tell the story: "Eh, we used to stop here, outside here look, like this [he points to the street outside his house] ..." Dino still stops on the bit of road opposite his house and sits on the guard rail with a friend, exchanging stories and memories and comments about the state of the world.

Before the war, and for a short time after it, these funny stories, stories of love and tricks played on someone, were exchanged shortly before and after the *veglia*, in a little group that kept itself on the edge to begin with and could then take over at the end, given that the elderly people enjoyed rough-humoured stories of practical jokes, as well as punch-line narratives. As Martino said, "We used to tell all those stories,

even our own adventures, even the amorous ones, you know, in the company 'He's done this, she's done that'..." The stories were often wittily explicit, but vulgarity was definitely not the norm, although they were spicy enough to attract, in the summer time in the *cortile*, the girls' attention and their supporting laughter, as will be seen in chapter 5. There were other people in the village, other men, who had a good repertoire of spicy stories, however I could not record their stories. Possibly because they were spicy, the men kept them for themselves, but referred to them and told me of how funny they were, and how they would try and get good tellers to tell their stories.

The women knew most of the stories too, even some of the spicy ones, however they were not tellers themselves. Women were part of the performance of the stories as much as men were, because most of the time they were the prescribed audience. It was to be heard by women that men told, especially in the *cortile*, during the summer nights. Eliciting laughter from the women, as will be seen in Chapter 5, was an empowering practice for men. Other than in the *cortili*, or sometimes at the *veglia*, the women would hear the stories from the men of their family and share a laugh in the home, thus getting to know the stories well, and possibly sometimes repeating them themselves within the home, or at the river, while washing. However, I was not given any direct confirmation of this by any female informant:

L. Were these *storielle* exchanged also among women?

Alba. Well, I don't think so [...] and then we did not have time to go around, because we had to look after the cows, when we were not looking after the cows we had to pick up stones from the fields, and so we did not have much time to go around and do...[socialise]

L. But when you were all together in a little group in the fields, you probably told something among you...

Alba. Well, some gossip [*pettegolezzi*] maybe, some *moment* like that, but we used to think about working and hurrying up, because we had to, we could not waste time.

All the women maintained that they had no time to tell stories, as they had to work. All their chats, during work together were referred to as gossip, and nothing more. I suppose that a lot of the stories in the corpus might have been seen as gossip, if the events in them were very recent. On the other hand I think that the word

“moment” might mean moments of life, sketches of life, although I could not check with Alba, for fear of making her uncomfortable. Giacobbe used to be tolerant of long discussions about definitions, but most people are not.

As the corpus of stories above shows, however, the village did have a few women tellers too, such as Menga and Lucetta who are the authors of narratives 6 and 41. And the men agreed that there were a few women in the village, especially elderly women, who were very “entertaining” and witty, and the men themselves included these women’s jokes in their repertoire. As will be seen later in Chapter 5, the age factor was very important. In general it seemed as though women acquired more narrative rights and freedom to tell with age. Both Menga and Lucetta told these stories when they were past their 50s.

However, there are still stories the women do not know, as was evident from the group interviews, where the only woman who seemed to know all of them was Alba, who had heard these stories in the shoe shop, where she worked every day with her husband. That the women do not know all the stories was implied by Dino, in narrative 1: “because you do not know it, at least the women, the men know it”. The humorous anecdote was the typical kind of male story, for the bar and for the street gathering, and Dino takes for granted the fact that everyone knows that certain stories were not known to women. However, it is clear that Onelia knows it, because of the way she can comment in the story. Her knowledge of the story might be due to the fact that her husband, Fernando, had told it to her. But she may as well have heard it recently, at a gathering, where men and women now go together and where the same old stories are told, regardless of the presence of the women.

What matters is that even if the women did not tell many stories at the group interview, they had however all the means to understand them and appreciate them. They enjoyed them and appropriated them, and they laughed even more than the men. And very often they were the protagonists in them, even without knowing, as was the case with Sara, who was for a long time unaware of the *balla* Giuggi was telling around, about the two of them picking chestnuts! (narrative 14).

Chapter 4

The Shared Knowledge Base Within the Stories

4.1 A system of shared knowledge.

“Well, practically, the little stories, to me they *remain within the village environment*⁵⁶, these, these adventures, misadventure...” (Martino)

Before focusing on the laughter, it is important to see how the humorous narratives achieved a specialisation of the restricted code. Understanding the humour of these stories involves understanding the elements of them which made them almost into cryptic jokes. Their humour is specialised not just because of the situations they report, and which can only be understood by those who share the “social pattern” of which the humorous anecdotes are a “symbolic pattern”; but also because of the stage on which the scenes are set. The stories, if they needed to function as a way of defending the Frassinorese identity, had to reflect that identity. Identity was not only to be found in social patterns but also in the landscape, in the people and their surroundings, and in the language. There is a concrete element in the stories that is fundamental to appreciating their functions for the community.

Through these stories I grew to learn more about the village than ever before. Many of the scattered references I had heard to people and places suddenly made sense when mentioned within the stories, because they were displayed in interaction among them, and I could understand more about each, by relating them to a moving organism of which they were part.

In this chapter I will analyse the element in the meaning of these stories which “derives from the great complex of indexical associations that they evoke – the people portrayed, other known aspects of their lives and characters, and *potentially*

⁵⁶ My italics.

everyone in the community, including those present at the storytelling event, with whom they are linked by the kinds of social and communicative ties that give cohesion to the conversations in which the stories are told” (Bauman 1986: 76).

Proof that the numerous references to village reality in these stories were fundamental for the enjoyment of a joke comes from the fact that a generalised joke would not have achieved the same effect at all. It was possibly for this reason that Dino felt the need to adapt the two jokes he told (narratives 2 and 4) to the village, by inserting village characters in them.

One aspect that is immediately apparent from the transcriptions of the stories is the amount of explanation, directed towards me, with which the informants interspersed the texts. Not only are the stories filled with names of villagers and references to places, but they also treat the habits and customs of those days, some of which were unknown to me before I heard the stories. It is through one of these humorous narratives – which, however, I cannot include in the corpus at the request of the informant – that I learned about the tradition of the *sganghiega*, which was how the Frassinoresi referred to the general celebrations which occurred when a villager had finished building his house. These stories, as will be seen in chapter 5, often portrayed moments of community interaction, and therefore it makes sense that they should be dense with references to community life. The real life of the people was displayed in the anecdotes, as Alba once observed:

Now they talk about football, or about what they saw on television, of all those things...which in the old days did not exist, because here the things [we told] were *all real*⁵⁷, the things that happened [in the village].

The “things that happened” were “real” because they were ‘about their lives’ and not about the lives of others, the people who populated the television set. Going to a dance in a the neighbouring village, going to invite a girl to dance, going down to the city to meet a relative, dealing with a distant husband: these and all the other situations in the stories were very ordinary events of life. They were typical and recurrent situations which provided a well known stage for action.

⁵⁷ My italics.

One of the first well known things for the people, in most of the stories, was the familiar landscape. This was the village and the various houses, and the neighbouring villages. Most stories, apart from those set in the city, take place in a precise space. The tellers carefully specify the setting for the actions in the stories. So for example in narrative 22, the narration was interrupted, just before the punch-line, to make sure I knew where it was taking place, as if that knowledge could help me further appreciate the imminent punch-line:

Dino. This happened here [he means near his house].

Maria. Yes, they were there.

Dino. They were there at....[Dino points towards the area]

These were indeed aids to visualisation, but also ways of increasing the concrete element of the story, thus giving a special texture to the performance. It is here that the dialect becomes stronger, and the teller can start imitating the characters. This attention to the setting allows the teller to start from the roots, to enter the scene in his mind and then be able to describe it “as if he were there”, which is how the people liked the stories told. Many of the places and settings mentioned in the stories no longer exist, but they continue to live and function in the narratives. It was through these stories that, after years of fieldwork, I got to know about Mariuccia’s inn, and about the fact that she was related to Dino. It was through them that I was told where Giuggi’s barber shop used to be, and that Dino and Aldina used to have their shop in what is now their living room – where we were sitting – and many other things that people had just hinted at, or not mentioned at all, but that the stories reiterated and transformed into context for me, a real knowledge of the place. The narratives were somehow revealing hidden layers of the village, allowing one to discover what it had looked like in the past.

Another aspect of the picture is that the stories, as with anecdotes in general, rely heavily on quoted speech (Bauman 1986: 55). The high proportion of dialogue made them a vehicle for the preservation of the dialect and some of its expressions which are no longer used, but were current expressions at the time. The dialect is preserved in dialogues in its most vibrant and effective manifestation. It also survives in some compressed expressions, and through these stories I learned some dialect words I did

not know. Perhaps this was quite understandable, given that I am not a villager and that I began to learn their dialect only five years ago. However, I was not the only one to discover new knowledge in these stories. Marco Piacentini, who has lived in the village all his life, is interested in its tradition, and has even written a book about its dialect, was surprised to hear in one of the stories an exclamation which he had never heard before. What I translated with “For God’s sake,” in narrative 7, was actually understood by Piacentini to be a very contracted version of *‘sangv ed na Madunna’* (lit. ‘blood of the Virgin’) – the result in the tape was something like “*vet’na Madunna*” – apparently a very archaic exclamation, no longer in use.

The presence of punch-lines, which rely on a certain amount of fixedness in their phrasing – in order to preserve their humorous effect in performance– has probably further allowed for the preservation of an older dialect. The punch-line joke is certainly the kind of story that had more need for correction during group retellings, and it seems that this was due to its evocative character, whereby the wording is tied to its original phrasing in order to arouse laughter and in the meantime to recall the voices of those who first spoke it. As Ochs and Capps write “Not only narrative content, but also words, grammar, reported speech, and conventions of narrative genres join narrators and listeners/readers with historical communities.” And they reinforce their point by citing Bakhtin who wrote that “prior to the moment of appropriation, words do not exist in a neutral and impersonal language, but in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts” (quoted in Ochs; Capps 1996: 31). Therefore, Ochs and Capps go on to say that “when we use linguistic forms, we materialise and blend other’s voices with our own” (1996: 31). During the interview, the participants could be observed waiting for the punch line and then nodding at each word as it was being told. At times they would correct it, making it more effective. This preservation often happened through the “performed imitation of the source” which “can substitute for grammatical constructions that indicate reported speech” (Shuman 1986: 161). Not surprisingly, Fernando is very much appreciated as a teller of these anecdotes because, as people say of him, “he can imitate well”. This aspect of “performed imitation” tends to preserve the words of a punch-line as they were, especially because it is very likely that those words were often used by the character and were therefore an aid for imitation. This also implies that these stories

relied on the audience knowing how the character spoke, what his voice was like, what defects of pronunciation he had, or which particular expressions he was known to use recurrently in his speech. So for example, in narrative 3, Dino says of the victim, “he was the one who used to say ‘I’m cobing! I’m cobing!’”⁵⁸, and “‘cause he always used to say ‘*Io bestrega!*’”

This takes us to a fundamental aspect of these stories, which is that they all contained very predictable characters whose range of reactions was well known to the people. Most of the protagonists were both fictive characters and ‘characters’ in real life. Their humour, their lives, their attitude were known to everyone. So well known that, had a villager been given a situation A and one of the characters in the corpus of stories, for example Giuggi, he would have known what Giuggi would have done in that situation. The villagers felt they could predict these characters’ moves, and this is why they could be good targets for practical jokes. A *scherzo* was carried out, of course, with the intention of relating it afterwards: it implied that the trickster set off with the story already in mind. He knew what would happen if he did a certain thing to a certain person. The ability to foresee the victim’s possible reactions was essential. Obtaining a reaction was what directed the *scherzo*, therefore the narrative, in the form of a script, was there before the action was carried out. As Amy Shuman writes about ‘storyability,’ which she defines as “what gets told as a story”:

Storyability is most often evaluated retrospectively, categories of storyable events may exist prior to individual instances of them. Further, people may engage in certain behaviours with a prior awareness that their behaviours belong to a certain category. People sometimes play out behaviours as though in a script, and they may announce, while in the midst of an activity, their intention to report the experience to others. The statement “Just wait till I tell my friends about this” acknowledges that the experience is storyable (Shuman 1986: 54).

When I recorded narrative 9, for the second time, in Dino’s home, I asked him if that *scherzo* had been conducted with a view to it being told to others. He answered, almost as if I was asking a rhetorical question: “It made no sense to do it if it wasn’t

⁵⁸ As I explained in the text in Chapter 3, because of a fault in pronunciation, instead of *ven* (I come) *mì* (me, I), he used to say *Ven bì*.

going to be known, right?" And his wife added "afterwards, the news travelled around every home, 'You know, Canacc has built a cradle...!'"

And as Dino and Aldina spontaneously observed during the telling of narrative 37:

D. You see, they used to have fun, that's it. A sketch, let's say, would come out [of a trick], a joke like, out of nothing.

A. And then, when they came back home, they [would tell that] they had done this, they had done that, they laughed, like that.

Tricks were indeed storyable events, in that they relied on expectations, created by the knowledge people had of the victims' reactions. The teller relied on the predictable character of the victim, whereby he knew the reaction he would provoke. Therefore he only had to invent an antecedent, something that could cause the reaction that everyone would find funny.

This knowledge of the character is another common assumption in the set, which works towards making these anecdotes that rely on a shared context different from a lot of other humorous anecdotes. The surprise element, which is often connected with humour (Morreal 1983, 1999), is not salient in the stories of Frassinoro. What matters is that the story ends up confirming the idea of the character the community has. While the behaviour of the character might indeed be incongruous as far as the logic of the action he performs is concerned, once his behaviour is related to the expectations of the audience, it is perfectly logical. Only if their expectations are met do they enjoy the story. And this is why the same stories could be repeated over and over again. Being surprised by the reaction of the character would mean not being aware of something everyone knew. Admitting ignorance amounts to admitting one is not a rightful member of the group (Shuman 1986: 171).

For humorous community anecdotes, the teller and the audience need to reassure each other that they have a shared knowledge (and laughter is an instrument of reassurance). This knowledge is similar to that we get after the third Pink Panther film we watch. We might not know which situations Peter Sellers will find himself in, but once they are introduced, we will know how he'll behave in them. Because characters were types, some of them were interchangeable in their roles. When Dino

told me his version of narrative 26, he told it with different characters from the ones Martino had used, leaving unchanged only the protagonist, Giuggi. The story still made sense, as the peripheral characters were like allo-characters in their function of silly men. Because they retained their function, they still offered the same amount of visual aid to the audience. From this, one could imagine the elements in the story as bricks that can be arranged in all sorts of sequences, within the same framework, and still give birth to a narrative that is in itself meaningful, because it contains elements of the village.

These characters were like a formula in the stories; they did not change and they rarely moved outside the village. And when they did, they did so still carrying their own mental framework, and were still predictable; so that even the unknown places became better known, because the people could visualise the predictable characters moving in those spaces. On these occasions, the characters functioned as mobile references to reality, which allowed the audience to visualise the rest of a story. They were catalysts of context. When Martino lingered over telling Anna that her brother was in one story, and when Alba told Fernando that his uncle was present at the situation reported in a story she had told; they were both giving everyone clues to fill out the scene in their minds. Visualising people in the story enabled the audience to visualise the space around them too.

The element of predictability is reinforced by another extremely important aspect of the characters, which was that they were not seasonal emigrants, they were among those who had managed to stay home, and were therefore constants in the village. This is a reflection of the need for conservatism that these stories were an expression of. Not surprisingly, most of the authors and protagonists of the stories in the corpus were people who had jobs in the village – Giuggi as a barber and dentist and more and Iusun as a coach driver. If any of them went to the *Macchia*, it was just for a season or two. Iusun ended up leaving Frassinoro to go to Argentina in the sixties, and unfortunately never returned, but before then, he had been a constant presence in the village.

All the preceding characteristics, taken together, show that the general context in the stories symbolised the stable and constant face of the community, the predictable and thus reassuring side.

During tellings, the people were constantly brought together by familiar names or references in the narratives which functioned as what I would name 'verbal meeting points'. These were words that, once spoken, directed the people's minds in the same direction, and ensured that they were all visualising the same things at the same time. These 'verbal meeting points' acted as "formulas" (Foley 1995:3). The "A ven bì" of Calisto, in narrative 3, is not just an imitation of how the character would have pronounced a sentence, it also functions as an evocative element that allows the people to suddenly feel the concreteness of the scene, and better visualise the setting too. The rest of the story almost rolls naturally out of these elements as soon as they are spoken, as they are most evocative. Also, these elements embody identity. Each element in these stories – people's nicknames, place-names, streets – can be seen as a symbol of the villager. These elements speak to the Frassinorese as "a vital part of their heritage" (Basso 1988: 121). As simple as they are, they contain messages. Nicknames for example, indirectly remind them of rules and standards, as they will often be coined on the basis of a strange feature or on the basis of the person not applying the rules, or not meeting village standards (Messenger 1978: 243). Every element therefore discloses and releases powerful contextual material, which is what enables the audience to feel at one with the rest and prepares them for discussion of the issues represented in the actions of the butt of the stories.

The restricted code of the stories meant that they had to remain tied to the people. They could travel even as far as Africa, but always among villagers. In this sense these anecdotes were exactly like the local dialect: it could be spoken even in Africa, if there were people who could understand it. So Dino could only tell these stories in Algeria, and Martino could only tell them outside the village in suitable circumstances: "Sometimes I tell them [stories about Giuggi], you know, to people who have met Giuggi, and they all have great fun." Stories about Giuggi were so tied to his character that the story could be appreciated without knowing the rest of the context, but most of the other stories in the corpus, could not. In narrative 3 for example, Calisto could just have been considered a kind man, since he offered to help catching the hen. What makes him foolish to the villagers, is the shared knowledge that people used to catch hens with their hat, as a common practice, and

that Calisto, misinterpreting the utility of the act, refused to do so for fear of squashing the hen.

So Dino, when commenting on the impossibility of telling stories to others, brought this wider context dimension into his explanation. He said he had never felt like telling the stories outside the village and, indeed he had hardly ever told jokes about the village, because “Frassinoro is not known, right?” It is worth noting that Dino did not say “Because the *people* are not known,” but “because Frassinoro is not known,” implying that the stories relied on a wider context, which embraced not only the characters but also the village ways, a more fluid context. Indeed, this impossibility of telling them to the outsiders, because of the feeling they would have not understood the humour, means that they themselves knew these were not normal jokes.

4.2 Social uses of the shared context.

This set of assumptions relied on elements that were rooted in the village and had been familiar to everyone from childhood. The stories did not derive their context from temporary situations but from familiar and stable ones.

I believe that this aspect made them an invaluable aid for those who, coming back from the War and years or months of emigration, had to re-establish themselves in the flow of the village. Even if they were unaware of the news, or recent events, they were, however, as aware of the wider context in the stories as those who had not left the village. Those who had just come back to the village could understand the stories and feel they owned them, even if they had not been there when the stories were first told. These stories were therefore a valuable and quick way of getting back into the fabric of the community, re-establishing interaction by handling a narrative that was flexible and could be exchanged in many situations.

At this stage, people with very different life histories converged, and these anecdotes provided an effective point of convergence for the villagers, a fictional space where they could all find common ground, provided by the markers which established the context of the stories. While waiting to re-build relationships – after all, as Dino said of his own experience of being a returned emigrant “One loses one’s friends” – the villager who had returned could at least rely on these narratives for

something to say and exchange. This narrative right was partly due to the fact that such stories were not 'news'. They did not update people, but actually reassured them as to the general non-motion of the village. Had they been news – stories on special events in the village – they would have made returning emigrants feel they had missed things, revealing perceived gaps in their identity as villagers. Besides, the fact that most of the narratives were invented conferred on them a sort of neutrality that made ownership a very fluid matter. It was not about having witnessed events, but about being able to handle the context in the stories, and arrange and convey it. The events in themselves were not that important, and consequently no one individual had more rights than any other to a fictional story. Those who had not heard the story from its author the first time it was uttered, or those who had not witnessed the practical joke, could still tell it very well, by accessing their visual imagination.

Dino himself had benefited enormously from these stories, when he came back to the village in his twenties, after the War and the years in Algeria beforehand – in total, an absence of eleven years. During those years, his father – with whom he had emigrated to Algeria – had told him many stories about Frassinoro, from which Dino had absorbed the context of the village. On his return, Frassinoro looked unfamiliar compared to Algeria, and relationships had to be built again. But Dino used the stories he heard, once back, to rebuild his relationships, and he was not told once that he did not have the right to narrate them, despite his long absence. As he explained:

L. But were you there that time?

A. No, no, always just heard it told, because he was not there at the time.

D. Because I was away, I spent my youth, you know, until the age of eighteen, away.

L. Therefore you were told these stories when you came back to the village?

D. Yes, of course, and then I told them too.

[...]

L. Then it was after 1945 that you heard many of those stories?

D. Yes! All of them. I know a bit of all of them!

L. When you used to meet up all together, did you happen to tell these stories?

D. Of course! Sure!

L. ...no one ever told you, "You cannot tell them, because you were not there at the time they happened..."

D. No, because then I used to embellish them a bit, I tried somehow, naturally, if a sentence was not exactly told as it had been told before it did not matter!

And Martino, who had spent his entire life in the village, confirmed Dino's right on the narratives:

L. Did Dino have the right to retell things that had happened while he was away?

M. Eh, well, of course, then he would learn them, because someone would tell them, yes, yes, they circulated.

L. Then it did not matter that the person who told had or had not witnessed the events?

Alba. No, no, even if just heard of.

L. What mattered was telling (?).

A. Telling and then, if it was funny, make those who were there laugh, yes the group. Because in those days one spent time in groups, because there was nothing, there was no television.

Both Dino and Martino justify the former's narrative rights as a newcomer with a narrative ability. Dino speaks of embellishing, and Martino speaks of being able to convey the humour of the story, if it was a humorous story.

This narrative ability was not just a gift with words and performance, but also the ability to work on the edges, to use a general knowledge to make the context around the event narrated so evocative, that missing a bit of the event would not have counted. Context is above action. Stories were repeated over and over again, and the events could be slightly changed, and no one would have complained. The precise order of events was not too important; whereas the markers were. The embellishing was done by working on the edges of the story, exploiting the potential of the verbal meeting points and expanding on them:

D. Eh, what mattered was trying to tell them in the best way possible, of course you know. But we are not learned people, you know, who would say "I must pay attention not to get a word wrong," you understand?

We told them of course [the stories], as long as the story had a sense..., eh, entertaining, let's say, have you understood? The matter was all there.

Aldina. [Tell them] as if you had been present. Telling it again in a way that it seemed as though he had been present too, this is the beauty of it to me. You feel it, you identify with the situation, and you tell it as if you had been there, no?

[...] 'Cause to me, the way they tell it, they almost make you notice it, they make you see it.

[...] The movements, the gestures, the looks, everything makes you enter what someone tells you. It is like a *favola*, if you tell it and you identify with the witch, the fairy, whatever you want, the child listens to you as though you were the real person.

When Aldina says that stories had to be told again "in a way that it seemed as though he had been present too," she was indeed referring to the space of the narrative being an internal vision which the teller could access thanks to some of the meaningful verbal markers or elements of the context. This vision could then come to the audience, only after it had come to the teller. From there they could proceed together, inside their collective memory, as if it were a common virtual place they could all access, and in which the teller set up different plays all the time. But the stage was always the same.

Giacobbe once gave me a definition of rhetoric which seemed straight out of the dictionary: "*È sapere convincere*," 'it is knowing how to convince.' Giacobbe's definition implies the existence of an art, a body of knowledge that allows you to "convince". On that occasion he was referring to the great storyteller of the village, the Patriarca, and to his ability to embroider and paint entire worlds with words. The Patriarca's power to 'convince' relied, according to Giacobbe, on his ability to make the scenes of the story sound realistic, by dint of details. Indeed, as he remarked on another occasion, the Patriarca was such a good teller that he was "like an orator, practically when he gives a speech, in the substance they are three words, only he adorns them". Giacobbe actually uses the verb *fiorire*, which literally means 'to deck with flowers'. Giacobbe used to say that each story of the Arabian Nights was one page long. The Patriarca had obviously read a reduced version of the books. But his art was such that "he could turn that one page into a [story] that was two nights long, because he invented." Other ways of describing the art of telling stories and the

ability to play with them were “to embellish” (*abbellire*) and “to embroider” (*ricamare*).

The “three words” the orator expands on must be meaningful words, which for cultural reasons, or because of personal knowledge, establish links with other areas of the knowledge of the teller, who can then weave that extra knowledge into the story and turn it into one of its fundamental components.

Here is an example of this process of accessing personal and cultural knowledge to feel more comfortable telling a story which reports an event that was not personally witnessed: Dino and Aldina work on the edges of the story, to buy their way into the tale. They start from the context, by accessing that general context and slowly make themselves comfortable, settling into the fabric of the narrative. From this position, they are able to look for the most effective punch-line, and deliver it. What follows is part of Dino and Aldina’s version of narrative 26, which I collected from them in their home, six months after the second group interview. This is the point where Giuggi meets Zurma’s father, who tells him the cow has died, but Giuggi understands that the girl died:

A. Listen, Ismino said, “Now we must be serious, right!”

D. Eh, yes, he says, eh, “Unfortunately it’s happened. She died.”

A. There was nothing to do.

D. There was nothing to do. He says, “And then,” he says, “mm, I cannot even sell it [her]” “What you mean you cannot sell her? Well then, do they sell corpses here?!” Ha, ha, ha, ha, it was a female calf that had died!

A. “She went in the *spagna*”, he says, “there was nothing left to do, we could not save her.”

D. She had filled up, they used to say, right?

A. But one had to hear it [the story], one had to hear it told by them.

D. Yes.

A. There was Ismino who was...

L. Who used to tell it, Ismino or Giuggi?

A. They were both there, weren’t they? But to see [visualise Giuggi saying] when he says, “Eh, when we got to the river, we heard the bells ringing...” and so he says, “She’s dead”. “No, don’t worry”, “No, no, she’s dead, she’s dead, because she was not too [well]”, Giuggi, right, “No, no she’s dead, she’s dead”. And instead it was midday, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha....

D. The bells ring, he says, "Hey, let's say the rosary!" Ha, ha, ha, ha....

A. He says, "And what can we do?" he says, "we recite the rosary." Imagine! You can imagine!

D. But you can imagine, us [and our reaction to the story] in the village...

L. What does going to the *spagna* mean?

A. Well, a cow, in those days, because now they do not even send them anymore, but in those days they would send them out to graze in the fields, right? And that, it's called 'medical herb', and in our dialect we say *spagna*. But it's a herb that, that creates a lot of gas. I don't know how to say...

L. Yes, yes, so it [the cow] was bloated...

A. It was bloated! And not always they could be saved, right. They could die...

D. Yes, we had quite a few instances here, but they were always cows, and not...ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, not somebody's girlfriend!

A. Yes, yes, no, he says, "When we got there, in the courtyard, we saw her father," "Well, she passed away," "She passed away?!" "Well, there was nothing to do!" "But how so?" "Well", he says, "she ate the *spagna*, she was bloated," he says, "she dropped dead."

Aldina inserts many comments during the narration and at the end she intensifies them. Both Aldina and Dino are relying on the visualisation of the characters as types, as suggested by Dino's comment: "But to *see* [visualise Giuggi saying] when he says, 'Eh, when we got to the river, we heard the bells ringing...'" He is visualising Giuggi telling the story and acting in it. His general knowledge of Giuggi allows him to visualise the rest of the scene as well. Aldina relies on the same general knowledge. She visualises the scene. She can see the characters and imagine what they would say in a situation like the one in the story. She adds to Dino's version as if she had more knowledge. When in the first line she says "Ismino said, 'Now we must be serious, right!'" that was a comment directed to me, while Dino was narrating, as if she wanted to give me a bit more context. But Aldina had heard the story only a few months previously, when we met for the group interview. It is likely that, as she was listening to Martino's version, she thought of a few things that could be added to make it funnier. The addition of the "*spagna*" is in itself very funny, because of its effects, and because at some point it sounds as though the girl,

Zurma, might have left to go to *Spagna* (Spain). But most of all, this addition is a sign that Aldina is borrowing from the commonly shared knowledge of farming situations, from the context, in order to achieve a better comic effect and find her way into the tale. Besides, when she explains what the *spagna* is, she shows her competence in matters of that kind and in the life of those days. By doing so, she is buying her right to tell the story, even if just on the basis of her general knowledge.

As for Dino, he works on the misunderstanding and pushes it to the limits. He portrays the girl as more and more similar to a cow (in Italian 'she' and 'it' are the same and this is why he can play a lot with the story), to the point that he launches himself into the macabre line about selling corpses, which is still very funny and which he likes a lot. Dino was following a route and playing with all its possibilities and connections. Aldina, on the other hand, was able to insert into the narratives the answers to my questions, when she repeated the punch-line and added that the girl/cow was "bloated". Together, they kept repeating the narrative and its parts, even without a precise order, but as if they were making themselves more and more comfortable in it, thus finding their own personal way in it, until the final achievement of a punch-line that they both found funny. Dino laughs a lot at this point. Aldina's new punch line worked very well: he could see the scene! Aldina is slowly making Giuggi's story hers, revisiting it with her style.

These stories gave people who were not authors by nature or by position, a chance to express their unexpressed wit, by embroidering other people's tales, by experimenting with ways of telling the *battuta* which they thought made more sense in a particular situation, by making the *battuta* into something that really made them laugh, thus accessing, through laughter, the atmosphere of the moment reported in the story. They could use the story as a general situation in which the character was moved by them and in which he spoke with their voices and verbalised their witty thoughts.

Stories were canvases on which any villager with knowledge of the characters could draw. This implies that Dino, as soon as he heard these stories, could use them to relate to all sorts of groups in the village: "Yes, because in the company, I can say it, they used to seek me out, right?" As long as one knew which stories to tell,

inclusion was assured. It was all about making the characters that were meaningful to each company come alive through the vivid narration:

D. In those days, just hearing a story, afterwards you would get going, naturally, because you liked it, and you knew according to the company when you told the story, and I would adapt them a bit, right, in the right way, right?

L. Therefore you understood what the stories were that were liked by one company or another...

D. Sure, Of course one could understand it! According to the way people reasoned, right. We are speaking now, me and you and her [his wife], and you can see that from one argument we jump into another and so on, and we would do the same with the stories.

There were different stories for every group, each speaking of the people that were most relevant for that group. Each group liked to hear stories about itself, and, through these narratives, the members understood that the teller was aware of their group's dynamics, and the position each one of them occupied in it. People could exchange the stories, thus buying themselves inclusion in the small sub-communities of the village. Dino was not just helped by the stories he heard once back in the village, but also by those he brought back with him, as they were of a storyable nature and they contained the people of the village too, even though they were set in the totally different context of Algeria. Emigration did not mean total isolation from the village context. Men would leave for the *Macchia* in groups of ten or so, called *compagnie* (lit. companies), and also when heading for more distant destinations, such as Algeria, the people would leave in groups of two or three families at the time. These 'micro-villages' outside the village were the context for the production of stories, such as narrative 37 and 38, which then found their way into the village repertoire and acquired the function of creating continuity between the life of the villagers inside and outside the village, allowing those at home to feel connected to their life at the *Macchia* and feel close to them, as they shared a spirit and situations that were typical of the village. The merging of these stories that had a common spirit functioned as an agent of homogeneity in the community. All together, these stories which spoke of the identity of the village were the "communicable experience" Benjamin describes the loss of:

With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent – not richer, but poorer in communicable experience? What ten years later was poured out in the flood of war books was anything but experience that goes from mouth to mouth. And there was nothing remarkable about that. For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body (Benjamin 1999: 83-84).

After the Second World War, narratives of war were not relevant, even if people had felt like telling them. The elderly used to tell narratives about the First War, but the Second was too close. It is still very hard for most people to talk about the Second World War today. None of the interviewees ever said anything spontaneously about it and they find it hard, when asked. Men spoke of it in the long nights at the *Macchia*, or when they paid visits to each other's homes when they were older, but war stories were not the chosen genre for interaction and gatherings. Also, stories about experiences outside the village – as for example Olga's father's narratives about the years he spent in the States – were often so out of context that people found them tellable only on the level of surprise tales, but not for interacting daily, for entering naturally into the flow of dialogue.

To this, one needs to add the years of silence spent during the War as soldiers, and miners for example. Giulio Cesare, who had worked in mines in France, said that they soon learned to keep their mouths shut and not say what they thought, especially as far as politics went. And he believes that you can still spot if a person has been an emigrant nowadays, at the bar in Frassinoro, because he will not be voicing his opinions.

If voicing one's thoughts while away was so hard, these stories were manna from heaven for those returning. They allowed them to communicate, even to delve deeply

into matters, but without appearing to. So, once the people returned from War, they were given a narrative currency for starting social interaction again. Sad narratives often leave people silent and unwilling to tell another story, and if a story is told afterwards it might be a funny one, to re-establish balance. As Aldina remarked in narrative 1, "This is what we need in the middle of the tragedy!"

In addition to serving as an aid for interaction, the stories elicited a kind of communal strength. To reinforce that "fragile human body," the people had to feel this body's bones, its heart. And the bones and heart of the man who came back were represented by his community: and they were found in the shape of "real things," real stories, that were a real reproduction of the community.

With every return, even the less traumatic, the people had these stories which were not just funny, but were also stable, and spoke of an unchanged village, the dream of everyone who came back.

These 'verbal meeting points' and the strong context were such powerful symbols of everyone's heritage that the individuals could borrow from them to fill in gaps in their own identity.

When, during the second group interview, Dino tried to make Mario recall an old story – of which Mario had been the main protagonist – he was reminding Mario of who he was, not so much by trying to make him remember his past actions, but by inserting Mario's name in the narratives, getting everyone to focus on him, on the image of him they had in the past. Mario had been among those defining individuals who had contributed to creating a sense of community. Because of his wit, he often became the protagonist of anecdotes. Mario could now borrow from that collective visualisation and the sense of collective self resulting from it, to fill in gaps in his intermittent perception of himself. Mario could visualise the context, and even if he could not exactly remember himself doing the action, he was following Dino's recreation and could possibly visualise himself occupying the space Dino was describing, behind the counter ("And so here [inside the room where we all were], you all remember, there was the counter here [there used to be a shop in that room], the sales counter"), and then buying the cigarettes ("and he used to smoke. 'Give me a packet of cigarettes'") and finally walk down the corridor ("there was a passage to come here, right?"): all things which were more present in Mario's mind than the

single event could be. Once the context was imagined, Mario could possibly see himself in it, as a character. And he could perceive himself as the person who, in the story, was talking to Dino, as Dino was voicing him. His visualisation of himself as a character was an aid to his perception of himself as continuous.

In conclusion, the shared context made for the fact that laughter for these narratives was assured, and, as will be seen in the next chapter, it was planned, asked for, elicited, needed as a powerful means of creating a sense of community and defining one's identity.

Chapter 5

The Stories that Elicit Laughter

5.1 *Laughing at and laughing with.*

I look at the following stories in their function of provoking an intersection of *laughing at* and *laughing with*. As Glenn specifies:

The phrases laughing at and laughing with suggest a long-recognized distinction between the power of laughter to promote distancing, disparagement, and feeling of superiority; or, conversely, to promote bonding and affiliation (Glenn 2003: 112).

This oscillation between affiliation and disaffiliation reflects the oscillation between community and structure. Broadly speaking, one could see community as coinciding with laughing with and structure with laughing at. Together, these two aspects of laughter, confused in the same sound, contribute to creating a dialogue between structure and community.

The dialogue is present within the stories, which often seem to appear in the corpus in couples. For this concept I borrow Christie Davies' definition of "pairs of linked messages" (Davies 1982: 390).

Starting from the assumption that humour is always initiated for a purpose, I see the stories in the corpus as being a selection that is not at all random. There is a balance among them, whereby they seem to provide two voices of the problem they raise, the composition of which succeeds in validating models of behaviour and of status.

With the stories the people were promoting *laughter with*, thus putting community over structure, in the sense that even the butts share the *laughter with*, given that people reacted positively to mocking (as will be seen). At the same time, however, the people were also telling the stories in order to focus the attention on a set of behaviours which, in daily interacting, would have been sanctioned through laughter, thus renewing the laughing at, which in this case was confirmed by the rest of the audience-community. So the teller was promoting consensus, reinforcing common values and reinforcing adherence to shared patterns by exposing the foolish behaviour of the butt in the story.

The fools, as will be seen, could be of many kinds, as could the laughter and the directions it could take. The stories show a variety of sub-communities brought together by laughter according to the subject of the story and according to the message that they mean to validate. At times, the villagers laughed at themselves and promoted this kind of laughter as a way of increasing elasticity of mind, thus helping to cope with changes from the outside. At other times, the laughter served the purpose of the individual who needed rehabilitation in the community. And finally, there was the laughter that was promoted in order to confirm the validity of the common values and identity of one subgroup in the community, as opposed to the others.

Communities of laughter change all the time (Sollors 1986: 132), according to the anxiety that is addressed. As Fine observes:

[T]he piece of humour, particularly if it is to be successful and to be repeated in variant forms, must be functional for the group, and for individual members of the group. It must support a goal towards which members are striving, either as individuals or as a group [...]. These [humorous remarks] do not occur randomly in social interaction, but derive from both long-term determinants and the specific events which affect a group. As a group develops, certain elements of its humour will be perceived as particularly characteristic, and may serve as distinguishing feature of the group for outsiders (Fine 1977: 316-317).

I see the performance of humorous tales as something that is done in order to elicit laughter. In a small group of people who know each other, I believe that the

individual can detect the needs of the community, according to the atmosphere. Glenn looked into “how people initiate laughter and extend it into lengthier laughing together” (Glenn 2003: 53). I find this point important: funny stories certainly were also reminders of situations in which the community had shared lengthier laughing. The almost ritual aspect of laughter is in its length; and the tellers in Frassinoro confirmed its importance, given that they were stringing stories together at sustained speed, without allowing people to interrupt the flux of laughter. In those laughing sections then, the people were somehow re-enacting past experiences of laughing interaction, and in this sense of re-enactment there is a feeling that laughing together was a social ritual meant to weave associations between past and present and among people’s past and present identities.

5.2 Starting humour as a response to group atmosphere.

When I asked the people how important laughing was to them, the unanimous answer was “*Importantissimo!*” and “We had nothing else.” And even as I tried to enquire more I was always told that laughing was important because it was all they had.

After the story of the *scherzo* in Algeria (narrative 38), Dino remarked: “Well, it was a way, right, [a] distraction, to stay happy at least in that moment [as the *scherzo* was being performed].” It seems as though the people tended to explain laughter only as a momentary alternative to the hardship of their lives, when asked directly.

But the tradition of humour in Frassinoro strikes one as being much more than just a temporary “distraction” and the stories in the corpus do not seem to be an exception. I think the people knew this, and that they felt that the distraction they were using was not actually making them escape from daily life, but rather allowing them a change of the point of view on life, which made life more tolerable. After all, a common saying goes, “We laugh so as not to cry” (*Si ride per non piangere.*).

The humour established new meanings for what was there, a momentary alternative way of interpreting reality. As Morreal writes:

Comedy and tragedy do not predict different futures for their characters, then, or for the human race. They are based not on

different kinds of events, but on different attitudes towards the same events. They embody different visions of the human condition (Morreal 1999: 19).

Dino once said: “[When Giuggi would tell such stories], we were all looking forward to laughing and telling it (the story) again!” The fact that he said “looking forward to laughing and telling” seems to point towards a system of creating laughter for the village, as if laughter was something they were supposed to create and propagate, as if it were an habitual means of interaction for them, that was used for regulating time spent together in groups.

Dino’s statement is one step closer to the functional approach to laughter-eliciting narratives which Fabio expressed about the *balla*:

“The balla would be a thing that is not true, but which is told to keep the company going, when there is nothing else to say. *You might say it’s no use, and instead it is useful to tell balle* [...] To entertain, to stay there, maybe, between one moment and another, during something, where however, there is a void, and there comes the joker of the situation, not surprisingly, who entertains with a *balla*.

There is a sense, in what Fabio says, of the presence of time, of the *balla*-teller bridging gaps with his story, to allow his fellow villagers to reach a state where they can restart interaction. This echoes what Aldina once said of Giuggi:

I think that for him it was really important to show that he could keep the company [going], you know, he used to keep up the spirit of the company.

This confirms the knowledge some people had of the need to create laughter. The narrative was a bridge that provided new material for interaction, after it had been momentarily interrupted. Stringing one narrative after the other, thus maintaining long laughing periods was and is still how the stories are told today. At the group interview, as the rhythm intensified, the narratives were introduced one after the other, taking advantage of the laughter of the audience to insert another one, before the laughter was over. The stories were quickly introduced with “*allora*” (well), only to give time to the audience to turn their heads towards the new teller; “Well then

...”, and the story began, they would not wait for silence or for the reactions to the previous story to finish, but would immediately attach another link in the chain. And then again, another man would start “Then I must tell of ...” and introduce the story. It was as if the people aimed at keeping the sound of the laughter going for a long time, in the attempt to reproduce the atmosphere of extended laughing that had accompanied the first telling of the story, the witnessing of the event, the day the narrated events took place. Interestingly Glenn notices that:

Extended laughings together become memorable, reportable, and storyable events. They offer relationally potent moments which may contribute to group solidarity, developing romance, or hurt feelings. Like other social activities (such as meetings, arguments and storytelling), laughings together occur, not accidentally or randomly, but through recognizable, systematic means (Glenn 2003: 53).

So when dealing with the stories in the corpus it is important to keep in mind that they do not just recount a ‘funny’ event, but that they are the fruit of a memorable experience which became so because of the extended laughter the event caused. The stories tell of times in which they laughed a lot. When told again then, it makes sense that people try and reproduce not just an image of the event through the art of telling, but also the atmosphere of the prolonged laughter which had made those stories memorable and worthy of being repeated. This might explain the need the teller often has, and which is a common behaviour in joke telling, to repeat the punch-line again a few times during the laughter of the audience, as if to increase the effect, until those who are laughing might beg him to stop!

So it is worth keeping in mind that the corpus presents reports of moments during which a memorable laughter was shared by the community or experienced by the teller and his group, which explains the need to tell it again, in the typical “urge to communicate a joke” (Freud 1960: 143).

When discussing the reasons for performing *balle* or humorous narratives with Fabio, we came across another function. The void in time could often be a void in harmony too – a kind of abstract interval – a breach in the harmony of the community. This is an emergency situation, where the *balla* teller has to come up with a narrative. The *balla*, told in certain instances, recreates harmony in the social

fabric. It is a narrative bridge between moments of tension. Because of the need to create on the spot a segment of continuity in the harmony of the group, the narrative employed must have a good degree of fiction in it as it needs to adapt to both sides, which are often opposed, and needs to serve as a bridge between them and reach towards both. A simple personal narrative would not work on many occasions and the narrative would have to be tailored on purpose, for the occasion. It is an aid to interaction, whereby harmony on the level of fiction could put a patch on a physical harmony, that existing between the people of the community.

There is an element of self-sacrifice in telling *balle*, and narratives that create interaction in general, whereby the teller could interpret the tension and deliberately put himself in the way and often tell silly stories about himself, just for a laugh, offering himself as a scapegoat. Some people like Fabio, and certainly Giuggi, have a gift for interpreting the atmosphere and spontaneously give themselves up for the harmony of the community.

Confirming the impression that laughter was not accidental, but was asked for or offered, were the words of Giulio Cesare and his wife, when they remembered another great teller of Giuggi's generation:

M. He used to be a good singer.

G. And so we knew it was the right moment to go and make him, make him...

M. The chorus...

G. Yes, we would start a bit with the chorus, and then to make him tell these, these things [humorous anecdotes]. These things that we were eager to hear. Even if we had already heard them, but we still listened to them with pleasure once again from him! It was something very, very...

L. Did you also admire the way he used to tell it...?

G. Yes, yes, yes! The way he used to tell it, because he would tell it with...The actors nowadays, there aren't any actors like him left. He would tell it with so much simplicity [he means ease] that it was disarming.

Really it was something that left you there...[...]

I mean, now, watching a film, now you can see beautiful films on the television, but in comparison to that [the anecdotes] they are not even a third of it [they do not produce a third of the enjoyment produced by the story]

[...]

L. And so, being able to listen to these ...

G. Yes, there were even people [men] who did not go to see their girlfriend, they stayed here and listened to those things there [the anecdotes].

And then maybe, when they got there [to the girlfriend's home], they found the door shut!

Well, and then we lost this thing [the habit of telling], with the whole business of cars, of wealth, of wealth...

Giulio Cesare refers to the development of a strategy on the part of his generation for being able to hear the narratives that made them laugh so much. Laughing activities were so absorbing that one could forget to visit the girlfriend. Also Dino mentions a similar attitude when telling about Lucetta's stories, which they used to beg her to tell them:

D. When she had had a glass of wine, we...we made her tell straight [meaning, one story after the other, in a row]

L. And so the women too used to entertain with stories from time to time?

D. Oh yes.

A. Oh, yes, yes.

Dino implies they used to incite her to tell them stories, and that they used to buy her glasses of wine to obtain stories. The application of techniques for eliciting narratives that created laughter proves that laughter was not at all a passive and accidental event, but rather a means of interaction people knew how to handle.

They also knew how to react to it, if the laughter was directed at them.

Another source of social data is, of course, how groups and participants respond to mocking (Norrick 1993: 78).

Being laughed at was taken well by everyone. The reactions to mocking in the community were always very positive. The bad reaction was considered a sign of rigidity. Many people said that they could not understand those who took rhymes or tricks personally. It was indeed seen as a collective experience, in which the single individual was targeted, but for the pleasure and for the sake of the whole community. This proves how much people saw laughter as a community activity and the single joke or practical joke to be just an excuse for developing community

laughter and not the manifestation of a personal hostility within the relationship between the trickster and the victim.

Wit was so highly prized that receiving its effects, though often offensive, was considered an honour. Narratives 23 and 24 tell of this kind of mocking, which could indeed be very insulting.

On at least three occasions, informants told me of jokes which ended up with the offended party buying a bottle of wine for the offender. What follows is the end of the version of AT1358c, *Trickster discovers adultery. Food goes to husband instead of lover*, which I collected from Olga. As I said before, her father used to tell it in the form of a personal narrative and used to tell that the victim of the practical joke, which was indeed quite a serious one, had reacted by saying:

*He says, "Lots [of tricks] were played on me... "I was played lots of tricks," he says, "because I am not that smart." He says, "But a trick like this, you'll have to pay for it! On Sunday we're all going to drink a bottle of wine, just because you were able to play the trick so well, on Sunday we're all going to drink at ...[...] Francesco's. He says, "On Sunday we'll go and drink and drink a good bottle of wine," he says, "and we'll be friends as before." He says, ha, ha, ha. My father says, "And so, not only we played him all sorts of tricks, but we even made him pay for the bottle of wine!"*⁵⁹

Another example was in narrative 4:

He says, "And what about my bedside table?" "Well, your bedside table..., first of all we go down to my sister's, at the inn", right? "And then we'll talk about it". They started to drink a glass, two, three, you understand? "And I'll build you the bedside table once you're married." [...] It ended up like that, oh well but he used to play some tricks that were not too... [innocent].

Dino referred more than once to the fact that the jokes could be very concrete and "heavy" (serious), and despite this, people enjoyed them and took them with irony.

⁵⁹ Italics indicates that the whole fragment was told in dialect.

Even the elderly did not mind being made fun of, as I was often told. I can cite one example in particular of a rhyme about an old lady's underwear that was reported to me by its author, Giuseppe (46):

The pirates' flags are drying up in the fields, but the mistake
has been big, since they are actually Altea's underpants.
Emma. But the little old lady was happy, right!
Giuseppe. Yes, right! She would go and write it all down.
And then she used to tell us, "make one [rhyme] about my
Erminio. He was her husband".

The fact that this woman wanted rhymes to be written also about her husband was possibly just a matter of fun and nice memories, but it might as well be a sign of a belief that being mocked could keep evil energies away. The fact that people took no offence established a final alliance between trickster and victim, and this is in itself an empowering situation. It is as though the people set up a figurative ritual play in which one is symbolically whipped and then resuscitated. I believe there is an element of luck-bringing in this behaviour, but it is obvious that it is common to most "joking relationships" in most cultures. A joking relationship itself, as defined by Radcliff-Brown who formulated the definition:

Is a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence (Radcliff-Brown 1940: 195).

"No offence" means that the 'victim' can either tease in return or simply accept it "good humouredly, but without retaliating" (Radcliff-Brown 1940: 195). Although in Frassinoro I could not detect fixed patterns of joking relationships, where one is the victim by custom of the same trickster, the definition is however applicable to the many kinds of joking relationships that were established, even temporarily, among members of the community, and it is important to notice that not taking offence is part of the definition of the relationship. In Frassinoro, those who took offence were considered people who wanted to be "precious" and who thought of themselves as superior to the rest of the community for some reason. The fact that laughter was not

employed only in a particular kin relationship, as suggested by studies of 'joking relationship', but could potentially be directed at everyone, was possibly due to the need to discourage individual pride within a community which relied heavily on solidarity. Maria once told me about a man in the village who used to make insulting, but not vulgar, comments about everyone, thus causing people to laugh at the victim for things, which would be considered hurtful. In particular she told me of an insult he had directed to a woman about her private life in front of many people. When I asked Maria how the woman had reacted, Maria said, that she simply did not react, as if that was the only possible clever reaction.

5.3 Placing the stigma: laughing at the odd one.

Some people were more likely to be the targets of laughter than others. Joking relationships occurred among elderly and young members of the community for the purpose of negotiating roles. However, for the majority of the time, laughter was directed at a target who was singled out because of some kind of inadequacy (although one could argue that the elderly were unable to lead the community and therefore laughed at for this reason).

The foolish and inadequate person in our corpus is not a fool in literary terms. This term conveys the sense of a double-sided nature, whereby the fool often turns out to be a wise man. However, in our corpus there are no wise fools who win in the end. Their speech does not subvert the situation, not even involuntarily. This is an important distinction to make now. In these stories, the victim, or butt, does not win. If he is stupid, he will not become clever (and therefore the winner of the situation), but will remain an example of clumsy and rigid behaviour. This is possibly because of the very concrete function most of these stories had.

To understand the position of the butt in his society, it is useful to think of him as a 'stigmatised person'. The term 'stigmatised' allows us to understand that the fool is socially created, since putting a stigma on someone is in itself an 'action', which is carried out by the "regular group", on the basis of its norms (Powell 1977:55).

Klapp (1954), in his article about fools, heroes and villains, defines the fool as a “social type”, thus hinting at this idea that it is a product of the society. Le Goff also speaks of ‘emarginated persons’ as socially constructed, by defining them as cultural products of the society in which they live (Le Goff 1965: 388). As a result, they both state that the stigmatised is operating within personality norms and functioning as a “role” for “avoidance” (Klapp 1954: 61) within the “regular group” which, as Powell observes, is the one with “the power of invalidation” (Powell 1977:55). Le Goff further develops this idea and states that the outcast is a figure of the outsider in a culture which ‘creates’ him in order to reject or marginalise him, as incarnation of the otherness that helps the community to define its cultural and spiritual boundaries.

The stigmatised person in our stories is not properly an ‘outcast’, as he is not excluded from community activities, on the contrary, he was often at the centre of them. However, this central position was merely a reminder of his function of being a role for avoidance. Society defines itself as opposed to him, so much so that Klapp goes as far as stating that where there are no figures such as fools, heroes and villains, “one might expect control and morale, in spite of the best rational structure, to be weak – in ways often characterised as community indifference, job-fatigue, apathy and the like. Strong organisations such as the Marine Corps, use them effectively to support their rational structure.” To him, the fool, the villain and the hero “as types are ways by which a group attempts to understand problematic behaviours” (Klapp 1954: 62). Also, “since departures from convention and crises are more or less inevitable, a group will be disorganised unless it has simple, reliable concepts by which to handle (and roles to play toward) such deviations which seem to bring them within a framework of comprehensibility and control” (Klapp 1954: 57). Indeed this is most helpful, looking at the outcast as a creation meant to simplify life for the structured society, by means of giving them a condensed version of all its defects and problems which they can keep in sight.

Klapp stops here, but Le Goff goes on to say two other extremely important things. One is that, just because we have this symbol of general faults, we tend to project on him all our pains and faults. Secondly, he describes the dynamic with which we relate to the outcast which we have produced. He gives the example of lepers who were confined outside the city in the Middle Ages, but near enough to it

that people could go and visit them, thus establishing their goodness, and building a good conscience. The goodness was shown through the performance of charity, and what they call charity, adds Le Goff, resembles the behaviour of the cat playing with a mouse (Le Goff 1965: 388). Goffman puts an almost identical concept in almost disturbingly illuminating terms:

The general formula is apparent. The stigmatised individual is asked to act so as to imply neither that his burden is heavy nor that bearing it has made him different from us; at the same time he must keep himself at the remove from us which ensures our painlessly being able to confirm this belief about him. Put differently, he is advised to reciprocate naturally with an acceptance of himself and us, an acceptance of him which we have not quite extended him in the first place (Goffman 1990: 147).

The non-reciprocated “acceptance” can become only a virtual, momentary acceptance, according to Goffman. I believe that these ambiguous attitudes explained by Le Goff and Goffman are detectable in laughing at the butt. The laughter is like the “charity” of which Le Goff speaks, it is the temporary virtual acceptance, which often lasts only the space of a joke. This *laughing with* that occurs as we *laugh at* someone, reinforces a sense of community at the expense of one. *Laughing with* implies that the members of the community are united in defining themselves as different from the stigmatised they laugh at, thus proclaiming homogeneity among themselves.

Now, telling stories about a butt is a step forward in this direction, it implies the decision to treat the butt as a didactic means and as an institutionalized ‘role for avoidance.’ The performance of the stories is a ritual for the negotiation of the boundaries between community and structure, between the push to include all and the need to define oneself, which can be done by establishing who we are not, i.e. taking a contrastive approach to the construction of the self.

It all makes sense. In small communities relying on homogeneity of rules and behaviours, the contrastive construction of identity could not happen naturally, since everyone was likely to follow the same rules. Therefore, to have an idea of who they were as a group, of their collective identity, they had to provide an opposite pole with

which to compare themselves and which possibly was so faulty that the stigmatised figure could not help but project a very edifying image of themselves back. I am here talking about joking relationships, which did not display any cruelty or offensive behaviour by the standards of the people. Because “communities of laughter” (Sollors 1986: 132) change all the time and members of these might migrate to other communities, and because one can transform *laughing at* to *laughing with*, these dynamics between stigmatised and trickster are not always clear-cut, as will be seen. Besides, we have to keep reminding ourselves that we are dealing not with first-hand mocking but with stories portraying an event in which mocking, and often self-mocking, was involved.

As far as the stories are concerned, there is an important difference to be drawn between the targets of derision in the village. There were two main categories, those who were voluntarily incongruous, or eccentric (the conscious objects of laughter) and those who were involuntarily so (the unconscious objects of laughter). The target of laughter could be a person who owed his deviance to what the community saw as a conscious decision: or a person who owed it to what the community saw as an unavoidable way of behaving and being, which was in his nature. In the next two sections I will consider these two categories, thus looking into the didactic character of humorous stories first, and then at laughing at as a way of defining oneself by contrast with a stigmatised figure.

5.4 The rebel.

Here I look at the conscious objects of laughter, those who were deliberately going against the rules. I return briefly to Bernstein’s description of learning speech through status appeals, so as to help focusing on what happens when the individual rebels against his social status. Given that the effect of the “[status] appeals is to transmit the culture or local culture in such a way as to increase the similarity of the regulated with others of his group”, then, Bernstein infers that “if the child rebels he is challenging very quickly the culture of which he is a part and it is this which tends to force the regulator into punitive action” (Bernstein 1964: 60).

In daily interaction, actions tended to be sanctioned with laughter when they were against the group culture, when they could be seen as an offence to the group. Indeed, Martineau and many others have noticed, laughter is a way to control “ingroup behaviour” (Martineau 1972: 120). I cite what Martineau continues to say, although I have found it expedient to substitute ‘laughter’ for his use of ‘humor’:

[laughter] [...] can be directed at someone in the group who either has not learned or has violated the norms of the group. [Laughter] constitutes a symbol of disapproval – a subtle way of sanctioning the deviant and at the same time providing him an opportunity to accept humorous definition of the situation, acknowledge the incongruity of his behavior, correct his behavior, and rejoin the group without “losing face” (Martineau 1972: 117).

In this case then, laughter is a corrective and disaffiliating action, or a “social gesture” as Bergson defined it (1911: 20). However, the kind of laughter provoked by the telling of the stories about behaviours that need sanctioning, acquires other aspects, such as the didactic one. The question is, what was the need the community was satisfying when telling these stories?

This is the case in narrative 35, where the girl pretended not to recognise the rake. In order to communicate this rejection of the familiar element, she pronounced the question ‘Wha-What is this?’ in standard Italian, thus distancing herself further from the village. It is interesting that Alba spontaneously performs it in a posh voice, as if to emphasise the girl’s detachment from the village ways. She is already guiding me to the interpretation of the anecdote and implying that the girl sounded very silly, thus justifying feelings of hostility towards her (see Davies 1982: 390). Alba has emphasised that, together with the shared knowledge of the object that represents the work in the fields and the rural nature of the village, the girl also rejects the dialect. That the two things go together is proved by the fact that the recognition of the rake in the end - “*Damn rake!*” “*Then you know what it is!*” - is uttered in dialect, thus making the dialect coincide with wisdom and normality, as opposed to the stupidity and oddness that had been communicated through the question in standard Italian, which was revealing double ignorance. Shared knowledge and common language go

together. And the re-found language symbolises the return of the villager among the villagers.

Pretending not to recognise the simple things of daily life is a very effective way of declaring we do not want to belong to the community. It cuts the individual out of the community as it potentially eliminates all grounds for sharing. Indeed it is a common device that teenagers, and not only they, use to communicate their rejection of the group. If they deliberately answer “No” to all rhetorical questions addressed to them in which they are asked to recognise common grounds in order to confirm group bonds (“Do you remember so and so?”; “Do you know so and so’s brother?”) they will openly communicate to the group that they do not want to think of themselves as members of it. The girl in the story is voluntarily setting herself outside the community as she is refusing one of its most important parts, the language.

Narrative 35 was evidently circulated to prevent people from behaving in ways that threatened equality and cohesion. As Abrahams notices for gossip, the things people report and laugh about seem to point towards “guaranteeing a certain level of homogeneity of ideals and even of social practices” (Abrahams 1970: 297).

In addition to this, the didactic function of the anecdote was certainly reinforced by a still common belief in Italy that, if something like a little domestic accident happens, it might be the result of something wrong one has just said or done. So, if a child fell, in a not too remote past, a mother would very likely have said “See, this is what happens when you answer back to me so arrogantly.” This is more than a ‘you deserve it’ statement, it actually implies that the accident is due to a form of divine admonishment, and I cannot exclude the possibility that the ‘live’ rake was considered as one of these ‘signs’, thus confirming that the rejection of the community was viewed negatively from above and thus giving a divine seal to the identity of the Frassinorese.

A very common saying goes “Speak like you eat”, which means that if you are poor and eat poor food, you cannot speak (i.e. pretend to be) like someone from a higher social level. It also means “be consistent and coherent”. But the reason why the people direct laughter at this girl and used to tell this story as an *‘exemplum’*, was

that they wanted to teach what happens to you if you decide consciously to behave in an odd way.

The person who is consciously pretending to be malfunctioning, since she cannot recognise normal things, is consciously breaking links. She becomes the half-creature that frightens, she becomes ambiguous in her alliances and makes society mildly anxious. Indeed, it is agreed that all the behaviour that could be sanctioned through humour could not be considered serious threats. Had they been considered so, the people would have used other punitive actions (Powell 1977: 55). The girl is, however, a source of mild hostility and anxiety, perhaps also because she is somehow spied in the process of becoming someone else, a girl from the city. The passing down of these stories was not about correcting, but about instilling fear which would prevent people from even trying to abandon the path. Again, this is another narrative that appeals to status, and as such tries to construct norms of behaviour by showing the opposite and the consequences. The people were not just afraid of losing a villager and seeing her transformed into a city girl – or afraid that others might follow her example – but they feared that she might freeze in that in-between position and remain in a space where she did not belong either to the city or the village. This is because the people knew that being considered a city girl was not an easy achievement. She could have lived in the city for thirty years and still be thought of as a mountain girl. The people knew this well, because they themselves feel this way about people who have moved to the village. The main risk for the girl then, was that she might have remained suspended in mid-air, rejected by two forces, by two communities. Belonging to no groups was possibly one of the most unsettling ideas for a community based on affiliation.

A comic example of this inability to complete a transformation, which turns the person into a half-creature, is in the many stories which are very widespread in Frassinoro and in all of the Modena area, and I presume all over Italy. These are little jokes which tell of people who rejected their dialect, as a sign of grossness, and tried hard to speak standard Italian (see also Messenger 1978: 235; Lowe 1986: 445). All they could do was Italianise the dialect. Marco Piacentini, as he was collecting for his book on the dialect, was given many examples. I could listen to tapes in which two informants told Marco about some funny cases of people who had deliberately

decided to “look down on the dialect” and speak only standard Italian. As it was, however, their attempts were comic, as they ended up speaking something that was neither Italian, nor dialect. They were in this limbo and those who were on either side could see they did not belong to either of them. As the informant in Piacentini’s tape says, “Either speak Italian properly or don’t speak it at all”. The examples are hard to translate, but I will cite one. The process of Italianising the dialect generally works by adding final vowels to the dialect words, which normally end with consonants. “A *cucion*” for example, which means ‘kneeling down’, was turned into “a *cuccione*”, as many of the dialect words lose the double consonant that they have in Italian. Therefore, in the over-corrective process, a consonant and a final vowel are added. However, a *cuccione* does not exist in standard Italian, and ‘kneeling down’ is conveyed by *in ginocchio* (lit. kneeling). Everyone would understand a *cuccione*, but it would be a sign of a poor knowledge of the standard language.

There is also a sense that the villager, if he stays villager, can see what those who have attempted the rebellion cannot see. As if leaving the village culture was an action that made you lose your powers, a similar loss of knowledge to that Eve underwent as soon as she ate the apple, or the loss of vision an angel wishing to become human would have to suffer. Applied to the village, the loss regards the wisdom which was inherited by the ancestors and which, according to the people, explained the world.

These little anecdotes, like the one above about the rake, are stories of their own time, and they tell of the conservative side of the community fighting to keep the city ideals outside. Women were the most exposed to city values. They went to big cities into service and ran the risk of being attracted by them, while men went to inhospitable places which could not possibly lure them into new ways of life. The story of the rake certainly became more and more functional as women started going into service in cities that were undergoing modernisation. The idea of being such a fool in the eyes of the community certainly kept many girls from embracing city ways: they knew that that kind of derision was reserved for the outsider and that the life of the outsider was hard; one had better get back into the village boundaries.

Similar anecdotes had indeed a levelling action in a society where people felt that “we all had to be even (equal) and shut up.” New things, even better things, were not

accepted easily. The elderly, especially with the in-laws who came to live in their home, controlled relationships. Here is how a female informant refers to the situation of young women in their parents-in-law's home:

O. No, no, no. You could not show that you were not doing well and the other [the sister-in-law] was doing better. Eeeh! You couldn't, because otherwise afterwards, eeh! It was a bad thing. And so you had to shut up and do everything like that, because they were old and we were young.

The society was conservative and felt threatened. The immediate threat was envy, but the wider threat was changes in the society. It was the eccentric, the one who took another road, who induced fear that city values might take over the village ones. Sister Costanza once told of a piece of pink fabric that her aunt, who worked in Florence for a rich family, had given her. From it, she could:

...get a dress for the big celebration, the *Maduna dal Grazi*. And so my mother had made it and she had made it with sleeves up to here [below the elbow]. And so the celebration came, it seemed like it was never going to come. And I used to go and look at the dress at times, where my mum had put it, thinking "Oh God, who knows what everyone will say when I wear it"[...]Anyway, I wore this dress, that I felt really like a princess in a fairytale.

At this point Costanza went to show her grandfather how pretty she was, and he said to her "'Oh Erminia'⁶⁰, if you are to go to church so undressed, you will not dine in my home today."

She went and wore her usual, everyday cardigan over her dress and went to church. The sleeves below the elbow were not just showing a bit more than usual, they were also different from the usual dress. They were a sign of an attempt to distinguish oneself from the others – embodied in Sister Costanza's dreamy "God, who knows what everyone will say when I wear it" – by adopting foreign ways. In itself, this was a break that could function as a channel for a bigger change, a divorce from the community. Allowing people to embrace the modernity that came from the

⁶⁰ This was her real name, as nuns change their names once professed.

city could result in many other things creeping in, and eventually replacing other old values.

This concept of time changes is implicit in narrative 35. The story implies that if you left for too long, it was then hard to get used to the village again. This is why it was fundamental to go back each May. From at least one of my informants, I gathered that if you did not go back for long periods of time, you were not very well regarded, you were seen as different, you were perceived as one who looked down on the village. Alba once told me that the mistresses they used to work for used to call the girls from Frassinoro the *rondini* (swallows) “because we would go [to the city] in autumns and come back [to the village] in the spring”. This beautiful metaphor created a sense of pride and possibly contributed to the reinforcement of the habit of going home in order to live up the metaphor.

But most of all, for the majority of time, going back was seen as the only thing to hold onto, in order to cope with life in service. As a result, if people did not go back, it was understood that they liked it in the city. And people were not supposed to like the city better.

Another example of a girl who wanted to become different is in narrative 11. Maria’s behaviour is not funny in itself. Although the funny part of the story is in the behaviour of Dino and his friend, who forbid her to leave for Florence, one needs to look at the cause of this behaviour. The derision implicit in Dino’s action is directed at Maria’s conscious decision to abandon the village. Maria was violating the norms because she wanted to leave the village and move to Florence. This did not happen from necessity, as was the case for most women, but from a conscious decision. When Dino says, “It was a pretty well-off family and her mother was desperate because Maria wanted to leave and go into service”, he implies that Maria did not need to go into service. Circumstances did not force her to go and cause pain to her mother. She wanted to go, “because I am tired of staying here, ’cause here there is nothing to get anyway and everyone leaves, all my friends.” This was a conscious decision to reject the village and was somehow an offence. The action the boys take against her is amusing but must also have been humiliating for the girl: “We made her undo the lace that kept her suitcase closed and, since she had a *bensone*, we ate all her *bensone* and in the end she stayed”. Undoing the laces means opening the

suitcase, and possibly exposing the contents. This is in itself a rude action. In addition to this, they withdraw the blessing of her mother, by eating the *bensone* she had made for Maria's journey. Maria was seen as a separatist, because leaving the village had to be done reluctantly and not willingly.

But most of all, what was derided in Maria, was her inability to adapt, adapt to the village, so much that she wished to leave. Maria was given a chance to stay within the community without being told directly that she was being eccentric. In this, the action of Dino reminds one of the parable told to give a person "food for thought", whereby the example is more effective than direct denunciation of the fault (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1975: 302). Indeed humour is a chance the community gives us to take a step backward without losing our face. The fact that Dino, who was not from the family, acted in this matter was a sign of the fact that the community was called upon to manifest their opinion on matters. The mother who had probably been worried about what people would say about her daughter had been unable by herself to solve the problem.

Whereas all these narratives embody the most conservative side of the community and were an aid to passing down of values, the next ones deal more with attempts of self-definition in relation to the group.

5.5 The comic butt.

In this section I will deal with the stories in the corpus which could be used to validate the image of the villager, the male villager in particular. When the odd behaviour of the villager was not seen as voluntary, the feelings of mild hostility could still be present, but the odd behaviour became entertaining, so much that people tried to provoke it, by playing practical jokes. The unconscious object often becomes a victim, and he is identifiable with the butt in the stories, the one who never wins.

The targets in the stories usually prove unable to perform some simple actions, which are among the actions taken for granted in the daily life of the people. So for example Giuggi being unable to stay silent in church, during the rosary (narrative 25).

Even qualities such as excessive 'goodness', or gullibility were targeted, such as the protagonist of narrative 38. Dino says, "This Ludovico was so good, that..." : the second sentence, starting with the consecutive particle, implies that the first was the cause of the second. His goodness was what turned him into the victim of practical jokes. In the same way, all the predictable sides of the other people made them good victims. In narrative 3, Calisto could be expected to offer to go and help catch the hen, and could then be expected or convinced not to use the hat to capture the hen, thus achieving the final result:

Onelia. Had he not caught it with his hat?
Fernando. But he used the hat [to catch the hen]
Dino. No, no, no, he went there without hat, with his [bare] hands.
'Cause he was afraid he might [end up] squeezing the hen [had he used the hat].

Onelia stresses the fact that the character does not seem to have done things properly, and sensibly, by not doing the only things everyone would have done. She is putting an obstacle to Dino's portrait of a foolish person, by asking whether Calisto did things the way a villager would have done, thus bringing logic into the narrative. So Dino quickly emphasises that indeed Calisto did not do things the way a villager would have done, and adds the reason why Calisto did not do it – that he did not want to squash the hen - which turns Calisto into a total fool, one who does not have a clue about why the villagers do the things they do, and one who does not know the function of things.

This last aspect is found in the performance of the stories, where the teller, through his descriptions of the main character, tries to load him with vices and faults, thus implying that he, the teller, is far from being affected by the same faults. The performance allows the projection of faults on the objects of laughter, since these last are essentially incarnations of the otherness that helps the community define its own identity.

The objects of laughter were the ones in comparison with which the villagers could confirm their own normality, their conformity to the rules and to the norm. Every time the community laughs at a stigmatised figure, the community is indirectly

communicating that his behaviour is not in accordance with the standard. This confirms the dynamics of group and it is binding for those who laugh, because they establish, through sharing laughter, their being different from the object of laughter (Glenn 2003, Chapman 1977, Foot 1977, Fine 1977).

It seems that the married man without children was not blamed, as people thought that there had to be natural reasons for this lack. But an unmarried man was blamed; he was often described as, and considered to be, a dry tree, *aibur secc*. The following anecdote tells of an example of derision towards a bachelor:

There was one [a man], there was one, a bachelor, right, who used to curse. And so he got told, “Ah, see that one, see, he is working to leave everything to the priests” – he had not married – and so he cursed!

It is interesting that this anecdote was collected within Martino’s family where both he and his wife remember their relatives telling them that a man without children is a dried branch. Here is what Alba said:

A bachelor, nothing, my uncle used to say they are like dry twigs, they are like a dry tree, which does not give any fruit and gives practically nothing

[...]

Well in those days, then, I think also nowadays. In those days, one who remained there alone was really, well, what can I say, without, without nothing, without purposes in life because one who works says, “I work for my children, I accumulate for my children”, because that is the purpose of a parent, that’s it. Instead they have nothing.

L. Therefore having children is also...

Alba. Yes, a continuation, a purpose. [which makes you think] “I leave – what I haven’t had myself – I try to make my children have it, to give them a different future.

This man had gone against the rule and had compromised the village dynamics. As Giulio Cesare explained, the usual way of things tended towards expanding one’s *casata*:

by attaching another [house] to it, and then it grew into a sort of huge block of houses which all belonged to those people, unless afterwards there were people who became poor, had debts, therefore other people penetrated in them [the houses].
L. Because they had to sell?
G. That's right.

A childless man would have run the risk of having no heirs in the village, thus being forced to leave his belongings to distant relatives who had never lived in the village and were perceived as outsiders. Had the man had any children, his *casata* would have remained in the family's hands. The anecdote about the unmarried man obviously acted as a cautionary tale and, at the same time, as a way of confirming village beliefs and village models. The telling of the story is a way of reinforcing what the Frassinorese have been told through proverbs, and of making the following generations aware of what would happen to them if they did not have children.

However, told in company, the story was indeed a strong device for men to define themselves and their achievements by contrast, especially during times of hardship. The joke provides legitimisation and consolation for those who had not achieved the wealth of the unmarried man. The joke somehow "undermine[s] the legitimacy" of that wealth, by implying that it is due to a behaviour that is not considered normal (Davies 1982: 395) and which is also considered anti-community. Also unacceptable was the fact that he does not receive the mockery with irony. Considering that being mocked was part of natural interaction in Frassinoro, and that most people accepted it without "taking offence", it is likely that the reaction of the bachelor – "And so he cursed!" – was in itself perceived as "a breach of the rules of etiquette", whereby he was "regarded as not knowing how to behave himself" (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 209). By contrast, the joke succeeds in validating the achievements of the 'normal' man, such as his ability to build a family – and ability to respond to mockery according to the rules – thus detracting attention from his possible economical failure. In the meantime, it could also provide validation for those who were blamed for having too many children.

Women too, had examples of women as opposed to whom they defined their qualities as women. Cesira, the woman who used the frying pan in narrative 22 was a funny character in narratives, but it is interesting that she was mentioned only by two

women and that a third woman generated another narrative about Cesira by enquiring about her supposed “terribleness.” Although very mildly, the community dissociates itself from her in the punch-line of 22: “But Bepp, are you not going to separate those two [women]!?” He says, “When the blood arrives down here”, he says, “I’ll go and separate them”. Refusing to help was a way of dissociating oneself from the act and the person. They are left to sort themselves out. Martino had stopped before this episode when he told the narrative and so had Dino, but then Alba went on to tell the half about Cesira. This last part was obviously functional for her, enabling her to establish herself as different (Abrahams 1970: 297).

When Dino, in narrative 18, says that “And it happens that he likes wine a lot, right, also this Iusun”, he is implying that the man used to get drunk. Had it been a normal quantity of wine that the man took, this habit would not have been mentioned. Dino is not just telling something functional for the story, but also portraying a character and setting context for the understanding of his stories (Bauman 1986: 60). From now on, the listener will keep in mind that Iusun liked wine and will possibly see his actions as influenced by this habit. Dino is also implying that what follows in the story might have a connection with the habit. This is a point in the story, which gives Dino the chance to dissociate himself from this behaviour and imply he does not have the same vice. If he did, he would not be able to comment on another person’s, as the community would react with some kind of comment. He knows he is safe enough to tell the story. So in narrative 18, the teller grabs the chance to define himself by contrast with the protagonist, even though the story itself does not need this detail at all. The discussion could have started without alcohol. Although it is there to justify why Dino introduces that narrative, it is also a way he has of defining the character and, as a result himself. Drinking and getting merry were accepted as a celebratory practice, but not as a regular habit, especially because they acted against another important rule in the community, that of hard work. Bauman notices exactly the same thing and writes that drunkenness was considered to “interfere with one’s capacity for work” (Bauman 1986: 60).

In addition to this, I had the impression that drinking was connected with misery too. The people described to me situations in which some very poor villagers who could hardly get by lived in desperate situations and drank every ‘*lira*’ they earned –

“And so they were always in misery, always in misery. Asking for alms.” For these people there was no reproach in the voice of the interviewees, but a great deal of pity. Of one family they remember that they had to burn all the floor boards, and the ceilings, to produce some heat in winter time. And the roof was so damaged that when the last member died, he was found in ten centimetres of water. These memories are still painful for the people. And alcohol is very much connected to this desperation, as the thing one resorts to when hope is lost. Possibly also for this reason, many informants liked to stress that laughter was alcohol-free and that wine never appeared in *veglie*. The telling of this anecdote had therefore a moral message which tended to communicate the community’s idea of alcohol and its potential to cause damage.

Together with being a hard worker, the other quality of a good man for a girl was that no one had to tell of him: “that guy gets drunk, because he drinks!”, as one female informant told me. So, also in narrative 21, where Iusun is caught playing cards at the inn, and therefore possibly drinking, his wife’s reaction is seen as a punishment for the bad habit.

In both narratives the main comic event pushes us to go back to the statement about drunkenness and allows us to “rekey what has come before”, as Bauman observes (Bauman 1986: 59). In other words, it is only when we hear the event that we understand that we have to reinterpret it through the initial statements. We then go back to Dino’s evaluative comment, “And it happens that he likes wine a lot, right, this Iusun too”, and use it as a key of interpretation for the rest.

While repeating the personal narratives of others, or the tricks played on others, the men add details that tend to communicate that the character in the story was different from them and from the village’s model man. As a result, the teller is validating an identity for himself that respects the norms and values of the community and, simultaneously, he is reminding the others who laugh with him of their need to comply with those rules.

This aspect adds another layer to the matter of narrative rights, which is closely connected to the perpetuation of roles in the community and with the need each individual felt to attest to his or her morality. As said before, the impression is that someone with the habit of drinking could not have told a story about another man

getting in trouble for that habit, as the story would not have raised laughter. However, this is true only in case of a mixed audience, where women are present. In an exclusively male context, such a story could have been told and men would have laughed out of a need to excuse their own possible failures. In a male context, the story would have contained an underlying message such as 'we are all imperfect and we all have weaknesses'. Laughing at such a story would have meant agreeing on the fact that weaknesses were excusable, among men. But, in the presence of a woman, the weakness of drinking had a different weight. It could mean being labelled as 'no good material for marriage.' Therefore, telling a story about a man with a drinking habit was in itself a moral statement, whereby the teller declared himself as compliant to the village's model man and superior to the protagonist. The community, and the women in particular, confirmed this superiority by giving the teller a laugh for his story, which confirmed his right to tell it. Automatically then, Dino also dissociates himself from the possibility that a situation of inferiority in the relationship with his wife, like that portrayed in narrative 22, could happen, or could have ever happened to him, as he does not have the faults that can cause it. This is another fundamental function of these stories and of the way in which the information about characters in the story is given by the teller. The fact that Dino succeeds in establishing a cause-effect relationship between drunkenness and the wife's reactions, means that he is constructing sense for the events while telling. He is building meaning through ordering the events and information in the story in such a way that they follow one another as in a chain, and are linked by a logical relationship. That chronological order corresponds to the explanation Dino has given to the episode in his mind. The logic is woven around the assumptions of collective thinking, the norms and world view of the community and the community values. The order in which the information and the events are reported in the narrative is indeed culturally influenced: it speaks for the teller's ideas; but most of all, for his community's ideas. If the character ends badly, it is because he has done something wrong or is unable to behave according to the norm. Somehow the order of events guides us to the interpretation of the story, and if we laugh in the end, we laugh with Dino and agree with his moral judgement, thus confirming that his values are ours too.

One important thing about the kind of stories above, which portray consequences of vices condemned by the community, is that the protagonists would never tell them as self-disparaging personal narratives. The reason is that they know that the community would not accord them laughter, as that laughter would equal forgiveness and relaxation of the rule. If we tell of our faults in humorous key, we hope people will minimise our faults. This was observed in conversational joking by Norrick who writes that, in certain contexts: "Laughter [...] shows the speaker feels embarrassed but hopes the hearer will understand; the hearer may join in the laughter to indicate that she finds the event humorous rather than shameful" (Norrick 1993: 39). But this would not have happened in the Frassinoro community, and certainly not among the women. Such a narrative might have got laughter from men, out of superiority and need to excuse possible weaknesses, but it would not have got the supportive laughter from women.

Another kind of behaviour some narratives warned about was the inability to adapt oneself to situations. This was embodied by narratives about practical jokes played at the expense of the naïve and silly character who could not embrace the basic rules of his society. In narrative 40, the comic effect is produced by Giuggi being exposed in front of everyone in his inability to play the violin. Yet, everyone knows that he will still go on playing, not just on that occasion but always. There is a clear declaration here of how different are the ways in which the foolish person and the rest of the community interpret reality. So in narrative 25, Giuggi is unable to do something that is very simple: "He could not manage to keep silent, he would go, 'Guys!' 'Shut up Giuggi, or she'll send you out.' [...] But he could not resist [the temptation], right?" This shows Giuggi even more unlike the model villager and suggests he is a figure living in a parallel dimension with rules that are not those of the community. In narrative 1, Olinto is portrayed as silly, by the simple sentence "Oh", *he says*, "but do you need to go all the way to Montefiorino to have your picture taken? I've got a photographic camera myself!" By this remark, Olinto is seen as silly enough to venture on a long journey without there being need for it. And he is seen as the only one who does not know about Dino's father's camera. Indeed, Dino's father expected him to believe him. That the comic butt is rigid, almost robotic (interestingly rigidity, or "lack of elasticity", is one of the first qualities of the

comic according to Bergson), is shown in the descriptions given of his movements. So in narrative 3, Calisto is guided in all his movements: "He guided him, naturally, here and there, and then, 'Be careful, 'cause it should be more or less here, right here.' He ended up, naturally, where he had relieved himself..." And the trickster succeeds in guiding all his action and makes him stop exactly where he wants him to.

Similarly in narrative 1, Dino uses this device of his father guiding the person to the position where he will become the victim: "He turned him like that, he says, 'Turn a bit, another bit. Perfect.'"

Scherzi were active ways of interfering with reality and the same need to shake up reality was possibly present among the workers at the *Macchia* and in Algeria, who carried the trick attitude with them to hostile working places: "The men used to tease each other, also as they worked, and then all these [stories] got told". Playing tricks on the always good-tempered man of narrative 36 was also a way of challenging balances. The laughter caused by tricks and by telling them was in itself liberating, as it broke through routine. Dino and other people often remarked that the tricks could be very serious. This heavy humour was perhaps part of the physical approach to reality, and to my mind echoes Le Goff's image of cat and mouse. It seems as though there was a need to test the resistance of the things that populated the reality around them. Accordingly, the foolish, the weak, the gullible - individuals whose behaviours and reactions to events are predictable by every villager - are periodically prodded by playing tricks on them. This, I suggest, reinforces group dynamics and self-definition in relation to the group, but also makes people aware of a general behaviour that is potentially dangerous for the community. Laughter was thus a reaction of self-preservation in a society that felt threatened by individuals who might have failed to observe the group norms at times when cohesion was vital for the survival of the community. One could also argue that the foolish was always included in the group out of a need to control him, so that his stupidity or inability could not be harmful by being involuntarily turned against the community. Preservation relied on good functioning and the possible malfunctioning elements in the community needed to be kept under control.

These stories told you that if you were not smart you could end up in trouble, just as folktales told the people that the smart always won. It is evident, from the many

occurrences of “right?” at the end of statements, which the tellers used to promote consensus, that each of them relied on the audience being able to confirm his words. This sense of proceeding together in the narration, whereby the teller at various moments makes sure that the audience is with him, is confirmed by one other aspect of the performance of these stories that is especially evident in Dino’s narrations. As I said, these stories were not news. And indeed they were not told to create surprise. Each story was told with the intention of being fully shared, of teller and audience proceeding together in an effort of collective visualisation. When Dino tells a narrative of a *scherzo*, he quickly brings the audience to the same level of knowledge and mental engagement as himself. The telling becomes a collective experience not just because the hearers can intervene and correct, but because something predictable by all is going to happen. The collective experience begins at the very outset of the story: Dino makes his audience immediately aware of the conception and planning of the *scherzo*, and how it was put into action. In other words, the plotting is a most important aspect of these stories. The reason why spending time on this first part of the story increases the humorous effect is that the teller shares with the public information which will be disclosed to the victim only in the second part of the narrative (Bauman 1986: 40-41). Therefore, in the first part, the audience feels as if it is plotting with the trickster, and shares a sense of superiority with the teller, as they both know what the unaware victim ignores. This is another aspect of the communal dimension of these stories and another reason (besides shared context) why we can speak of a “restricted code” for these stories. This sense of all being opposed to the foolish character is important for building identity, which gains strength if there is an opposite with which it can be confronted. The fool functions as the ‘opposite’ pole that allows people to recognise themselves by differentiation from him. By emphasising what we are not we become aware of what we are, and this promotes a sense of self.

5.6 Playing the fool.

Some of the people whom I have called fools were anything but that in real life, and we need now to consider the phenomenon of people pretending to be fools. In the case of some of the practical jokes, the victims reacted by producing their own

narratives about themselves. This occurred with different intentions and purposes, but stemmed from a common underlying need, that of resisting “accusations that might lower self-worth” (Wood 1983: 119). The stories in the corpus seem to reveal two main ways of resisting such accusations. One concides with what is described by Wood as a tendency to “assume[e] characteristics to which [the accusations] will not apply”. The other, as far as Frassinoro is concerned, is to produce self-mocking narratives, and it is not identified in Wood’s classification. I therefore define it as ‘magnifying one’s weakness’.

To understand the dynamics of a group, one has to look at its internal workings. Part of its overall cohesion is due not to spontaneous attractive impulses at micro level, but to a centripetal force generated by the fear of rejection. The deviant is aware of being such, but does not seek (at least overtly) to extricate himself from the situation. Meaning is not verbalised or expressed directly. On the contrary, he uses a specialised form of interaction – laughter. As Glenn puts it, he turns *laughter at* into *laughter with*:

Willingness to go along with, or even initiate, laughter at oneself provides potential payoff in realigning towards affiliation. Once *laughing at* either is underway or relevant, willingness to laugh at self provides a resource for converting the environment to *laughing with*. By transforming *laughing at* to *with* (or vice versa), participants may accomplish a micro-transformation of social structure (Glenn 2003: 54).

Giuggi was able, through self-irony, to get the community to laugh with him, while laughing at him. One thing the people often say about Giuggi is that he did not take tricks and jokes about him amiss. Although this is part of a healthy joking relationship, I also feel that this reflects the mechanism of which Goffman speaks, the dynamic of “reciproc[at]ing] naturally with an acceptance of himself and us, an acceptance of him that we have not quite extended him in the first place.” Giuggi, through the jokes he tells about himself in which he plays as people expect him to play, is showing apparent acceptance of his role of village fool. He had tried to show this acceptance of the role in which he had been put, and the people took this as the reassuring statement that he was happy with it. This explains the many assurances I received about how light-heartedly Giuggi took the jokes.

Giuggi was greatly respected and considered to be someone with a rare gift for telling and with a wonderful temper which allowed him to accept people's jokes about himself. He was a pivotal presence in the company, and the people I interviewed all had great affection for him.

However, he was also the man who tried lots of jobs but could not really succeed in any of them, who told tall tales about women, but was faithfully married to his wife. And from what I could gather, Giuggi had an independent mind, and was not too affected by rules. He lived somehow on the margins, although rooted in the community. In this context, one report of Giuggi has struck me in particular. Fabio remembers that he used to whistle all the time, so much so that if someone now whistles for more than a minute, he and his brothers will call the whistler, "O Giuggi!" At times, Fabio said one would be aware of Giuggi's presence long before seeing him, because of his whistling. Fabio recalls an episode in which he was coming back home at night, as a teenager, after having had too much to drink. As he fell on the grass and was drifting to sleep, he could hear Giuggi whistling, but did not see him. On the following morning he met Giuggi, who merely made a very indirect remark to the effect that "you must have been very tired last night". That whistle from a distance reminds me of the little bells of literary fools, who are present and see, but who hardly make themselves acknowledged, and save their words for later, when they can be much more effective.

At all events, his freedom of mind and behaviour also caused Giuggi to be seen as a "character" and a good victim for tricksters. And it was to the tricks and to the perception people had of him as a "character" that Giuggi reacted with his narratives. His reaction was not meant to subvert the image people had of him, but actually to feed it. Therefore, even his tall tales were extremely humorous, and not least because of the evident contrast they made with his real self. He was aware of this mechanism and was able to play with it, through his rare imagination, to achieve great narrative results. Narrative 42, in which Giuggi tells of his very successful course for hairdressing, is a good example of a tall tale told with the total awareness that it would have made everyone laugh, since they all knew it was not true.

Narrative 14 was also a fabrication. Something similar had happened to Sara and a female friend of hers, and Giuggi had adapted it to himself. Everyone knew he had

not experienced such adventures with women, in which he had come in close contact with them. And this knowledge created a comic contrast between his real self and his fictional counterpart. This contrast or incongruity between the character Giuggi and the real person as seen by his friends was exactly what made the stories funny. Had it been a real exploit, no one would have found it amusing. As Norrick suggests (1993: 46), a man praising himself is not funny. The only person who could have told such stories – incidentally allowing the males to release their sexual tensions too – was someone who was seen by everyone as the last man who could have possibly lived such an adventure. Giuggi certainly knew this and he was certainly aware of the community function his stories had, for uniting people and releasing tensions.

He never told to be believed. In Giulio Cesare's words:

Those were things [in] which, knowing Giuggi, there was a true starting point, but then he embellished them, he made, as... a corollary, he went all around them and inflated them like crazy.

Not surprisingly, most of the anecdotes Giuggi used to tell concerned adventures he had supposedly had while away from the village or when not seen by anyone. All he needed to achieve was non-credibility. Some of his stories, however, were believed, as they apparently matched the clumsy image people had of him. Thus narrative 43, in which he clumsily digs potatoes, narratives 29 and 30, in which he told of his negative performances as dentist and barber, and narrative 12, in which Giuggi's *bensone* is eaten by a passenger on the train on which he was travelling, were believed as true. Here is something Alba told of Giuggi, which is in itself a narrative, although not one he used to tell himself:

Alba. [...] he used to do things, ha, ha, ha, right, but he was convinced he was doing the right thing, but they were all funny things.

M. He used to be a barber, a painter, and a dentist, just to take them [teeth] out, not to put them in, to...But he was a type like that.

Alba. Once he [Martino] had a sore back, he [Giuggi] says, "I'll come and ...[they both laugh] and so, his back was

blocked and he had the *witch's stroke*⁶¹, I don't, I don't know how it's called. And so he says, "Now lie down on the floor", ha, ha, ha, he made him lie down on the floor and then, he was pulling his [Martino's] skin like that, and then he pressed him. There was my daughter there who was little and was saying, "Oh my God, he's killing my dad!" Ha, ha, ha! He was so convinced he was doing the right things, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha [...] The back pain had remained, but he had done his good deed.

Although Giuggi might have done this with a jocular spirit, Alba maintains that "He was so convinced he was doing the right things." I believe that this image people had of him was fed by his own self-disparaging narratives.

In them he was playing with his reputation of being not too good at what he attempted. What Giuggi did was inflate the idea people had of him and create an inept and inadequate character, unable to grasp the simplest basics of society. In other words he personified the feeling of inadequacy that he felt in his society. In my mind, the choice Giuggi made of portraying himself in his stories as a man unable to absorb the simplest norms of society was an exaggerated way of expressing how he felt in that society. Also, it was a sign of his total grasp of storyable stories, since he was utilising the very devices the community used for creating the image of the fool who could not conform to the elementary norms of their material culture.

In narrative 43, Giuggi portrays himself as unable to dig potatoes. That Giuggi did not know how to dig potatoes is literally impossible, just as it was nearly impossible that Menga, in narrative 6, did not know the Novena. Giuggi, just like Menga, portrays himself as a classic rigid fool, who reproduces the required action mechanically, cannot learn from his mistake, and cannot stop his silly action, just as Calisto was portrayed in his attempt to catch the hen. In Giuggi's narrative as reported by Fabio, we hear that:

Only, the spade, every time it caught a potato, it cut it. In the end – but they were ten, fifteen kilos of potatoes – there were more than three quarters of them which were cut in the middle, they had to be thrown away.

⁶¹ It is a common expression for when one makes a move and then suddenly cannot straighten their back anymore. As if the witch had cursed you and left you in the position you were in when her power hit you.

He had kept on doing the wrong thing, unable to stop himself and rectify his actions. I believe that this was a voluntary choice, possibly due to the need he felt to tell, coupled with the awareness that this was the only storyable genre he was allowed. In the same way, in narrative 12, he tells of how the *bensun* he had been given for his journey to the military front got eaten before he was half way through the journey. Giuggi used to exaggerate his inadequacy, by suggesting that he could have been so silly as to allow someone to steal his *bensun* piece by piece from under his arm, and leave nothing but the paper. The underlying message is 'how can a man like this be a good soldier, if he cannot even manage to guard his lunch?' The gullibility shown in this scene is in great contrast with the dramatic reason of the character's journey. His story was supposed to give his friends both a means to laugh about the war and its misery and a way of reinforcing the image of themselves as valiant soldiers.

The device of building inadequacy is used again, and very effectively, in narrative 26, where Giuggi goes to see his ill girl-friend. In this story, the part which causes everyone to laugh most (as can be seen in the transcript) was that in which Giuggi interprets the midday church bells as the bells announcing death. Giuggi obviously lingered on this part, so much that he added also that he had asked his friends to take the rosary beads out, to recite the rosary, as people do on occasions of death. He was a good Catholic, but had completely mistaken the church bells:

M. Go on foot. There was a passage along which you had to walk. And so, they leave, they go on foot, and midday strikes. Alba. The [church] bells.

M. The bells that were striking midday. Giuggi says, "Here comes the Hail Mary {everyone laughs}. Sesto, take the [rosary] beads out, so we can say the rosary." {everyone laughs wholeheartedly} And then, they walk to the house because...

The sound of the bells was something that had marked the day for the villagers since they were born. Interpreting it was something everyone could do. Failing to do so, and so overtly, was indeed extremely funny to them, because absurd. Giuggi was portraying himself like one of the fools in folktales, who fail to interpret simple

instructions and take directions literally, thus causing trouble. Helping him to reproduce this stereotype was his narrative style which in two cases is reminiscent of the rhythm of two famous animal tales in the village. Narrative 26 echoes the structure of *The Badia's Cockerel*, a village version of a mix between ATU 20C (The animals flee in fear of the end of the World) and ATU 20D (Pilgrimage of the Animals), in which the cockerel meets various animals who ask him where he is going and end up following it, because their names are written on a list the cockerel carries with him. The story always comes to mind when Giuggi picks up his friends to accompany him on his adventure, and in his subsequent encounter with the lady who asks them where they are from and where they are going. The rhythm of narrative 26 is very much that of the journey with many stops, one of which is that of the church bells. Narrative 26 may simply echo the tale, but one cannot exclude the possibility that Giuggi was consciously influenced by the folktale as he elaborated narrative 26. In the folktale as found in Frassinoro the cockerel was either running away from the world that was about to fall on his head, or going to Rome to take Tugna to her wedding, whereas in Giuggi's narrative they are going the funeral of Zurma.

Just the same kind of echo is found in narrative 14, which recalls another famous tale in the village, *The Wolf and the Fox*, a version of ATU 41 (The Wolf overeats in the cellar). In this tale, the fox and the wolf eat food that does not belong to them, they are discovered and chased, and the wolf gets beaten by the peasant, while the fox escapes. They then meet again, on the way, and the fox pretends to have been beaten up more than the wolf, thus succeeding in getting the wolf to carry her all the way to the river, where she can drink. Here the wolf helps her to drink and then the fox gets rid of him (it is worth noticing that the fox is feminine in Italian, and is often compared to a cunning woman). In narrative 14, Giuggi and Sara steal the chestnuts, but are discovered and chased away, and begin a journey which takes them past the beehive, where Sara gets stung. From here, the woman keeps moaning in pain, just like the fox, and Giuggi has to take her to the river to alleviate her pain. The parallels are perhaps fleeting, but still of interest when one is dealing with mental material from which people draw for the construction of stories and personal narratives. At all events, if the audience recognised even sub-consciously a familiar structure in these

stories, it would have helped them to take the story in and remember it. Regardless of questions of technique, however, what is significant is the fact that Giuggi created a narrative in which he literally made a fool of himself and presented this persona and story to his community, so that they could use it and laugh at him. Giuggi used the laughter that was directed against him to reinsert himself in the community, as an indispensable figure. It is here that laughter at is turned into laughter with.

All this leads up to a very important point. However much the derision directed against Giuggi meant that the community did not see him as a strong male model, Giuggi managed to make his real identity indispensable to the community. His real self was necessary to the community, as it provided the counterpart for the fictive self; and this contrast between the two selves was what caused the laughter. The enjoyment and release caused by Giuggi's narratives meant that the people had an interest in feeding his narrative identity: but for this very reason, also his real identity acquired equal importance. Through his narratives, he was able to reinsert himself into the very society which had 'rejected' aspects of him on the basis of its codified norms. The 'fool' had thus achieved the purpose of being 'accepted' by the community for who he was. And indeed, Giuggi had an indispensable role in his community, and was always included in every social activity. As Dino said, "Whenever we used to organise something, Giuggi would always come around too."

In addition to creating a social niche and function by making himself an object of laughter, Giuggi's self-disparaging stories had another fundamental function. It is important to recall that most of the self-effacing narratives about Giuggi in the corpus were created by himself. The people enjoyed his stories and repeated them. The ones other people told, based on tricks, are the minority, and Giuggi had the monopoly of stories about himself. But if it was Giuggi who was circulating narratives about himself, and hence controlling what aspects of himself could be offered up for derision, he was directing the community's laughter.

Directing humour at oneself is a way of controlling the derision, and thus, referring to self-irony, Freud states that "the person concerned finds criticism or aggressiveness difficult so long as they are direct, and possible only along circuitous paths" (Freud 1960: 142). In other words, when one is aware of having a characteristic that might be laughed at, or a situation that might be an object of

derision, it is preferable to direct the humour at oneself, in one's own terms, and control the game. Society is satisfied, as the exposure of the incongruity has been achieved, but the victim has orchestrated it to suit him better, through his own "circuitous paths". It is through his ability to turn *laughter at* into *laughter with* that Giuggi succeeds in subverting the situation. He does not subvert the situation inside his narratives, as he remains a fool in them; but he operates the subversion outside the narratives, in the performance situation. This mechanism is perfectly described in the following lines, where Glenn quotes a passage from the autobiography of professional comedian Dick Gregory, who describes having applied exactly the same technique as Giuggi when he was a child:

I got picked on a lot around the neighbourhood....I guess that's when I first begin to learn about humour, the power of a joke....At first...I'd just get mad and run home and cry when kids started. And then, I don't know just when, I started to figure it out. They were going to laugh anyway, but if I made the jokes they'd laugh *with* me instead of at me. I'd get the kids off my back, on my side. So I'd come off that porch talking about myself....

Before they could get going, I'd knock it out first, fast, knock out those jokes so they wouldn't have time to set and climb all over me....And they started to come over and listen to me, they'd see me coming and crowd around me on the corner.... Everything began to change then....The kids began to expect to hear funny things from me, and after a while I could say anything I wanted. I got a reputation as a funny man. And then I started to turn the jokes on them (quoted in Glenn 2003: 120).

Glenn's comment is also worth quoting:

Gregory realigned his role from that of unwilling butt to willing creator of jokes, from others *laughing at* him to *laughing with* and, ultimately, to him laughing at others.

Knowledge of this possibility itself provides a resource for creating affiliation. Conversationalists can create situations in which laughing at them is relevant, as a means of inviting and promoting affiliation. One phrase in our common parlance for this is "playing the fool." Those who provide this role may begin as victims, like Dick Gregory, or begin by willingly producing items for others to laugh at. In ongoing

relationships who is to say which comes first? Does Stanley, in the example above, play the fool because his friends laughed at him? Or do his friends orient to the possibility of laughing at him because he has, at other times, willingly played the fool? Either way, laughing at and laughing with provide tools for disaffiliating and affiliating (Glenn 2003: 120).

Possibly to avoid disaffiliation, Dino resorted spontaneously to self irony in narrative 5. I suspect that the event might have raised jealousy at the time it happened, and Dino might have been perceived as following ways that were not the usual ones of the community. Nowadays, irony might still be a useful stratagem to avoid being perceived as someone who likes to boast about his adventures. As Dino told the story in the past, however, soon after the event had taken place, his irony was probably designed to ensure that his community welcomed and included him. After all, he had just come back from years in Algeri, a big city, and had been travelling a lot during the War, seeing many places. There is a sense that he applied the mockery to himself, before the others could apply it to him.

In those days, having a few days to go on a honeymoon was a rare thing, let alone with a brand-new camera. These circumstances could have been seen as an attempt on Dino's part to embrace a life-style that was not that of the community. Dino was possibly aware of this. The story allows him to present his experience to the villagers in a way that deflected their possible latent envy and reassured them that he was still one of them.

Dino starts the story by stating the equality between him and his audience, emphasising the fact that they shared the same situation:

Well then, I got married in '47, right? As you know there weren't any cameras. We were poor, poorer than now let's say, right.

However, Dino was in a good position, as "naturally my brother had given me a camera". Following this statement, Dino softens it by saying: "You know, I didn't even know how to make it work. I couldn't make it work." His admitted lack of skills re-establishes equality, as if the effect of owning a valuable camera was annulled. Then he moves on to describing the surroundings. At this point, Dino

describes himself and Aldina as two fish out of water. Dino diminishes the image of himself and Aldina taking a leisurely walk on the bridge by declaring that he was sure that the photographer saw them as tourists, as not belonging there, and he verbalises his thought: "And so they saw us as two tourists, right. He says, 'These two are tourists, without doubt.'"

The following passage, in which Dino is obstinate and refuses to have their picture taken by the photographer, succeeds in gaining the sympathy of the people, who laugh a lot, as he makes play with a characteristic of himself which is known to the people, his pride. But Dino soon deflates his pride and admits to having given in. He then gets to the photographic studio. Here Dino succeeds in tempering this potentially grandiose experience by depicting himself as overwhelmed by the place and unable to behave in it. He conveys his anxiety at the thought of the money which they would have had to spend, thus conveying that he did not have much money, and gets to the point of preparing Aldina to pretend she was not well, so as to allow them both to escape⁶². He builds solidarity with the people by describing the studio in the way the outside was often indirectly portrayed in village stories, as big and overwhelming: "And so the moment came when they told us to go in to the photographic studio. Spotlights you know, here and there, everywhere." The gestures Dino makes when describing the spotlights are very eloquent – his arms up in the sky, to convey that they were under these lights, and intimidated by them.

Then he portrays himself as unable to deal with the photographer – so embarrassed that, despite his (comic) attempt to be firm, he ends up in a cowardly way blaming his mute wife. In the end, he underlines his unheroic behaviour, by projecting it, reiterating it through the voice of the photographer: "But you must tell me about that gentleman. Was he your brother?" She says, "Yes". "What a character!" he said, "he was blaming his wife for everything."

In this very balanced narrative Dino alternates statements which could arouse feelings of inequality, with statements he carefully tailors to undermine or subvert the previous statements and those feelings. With great rhythm and regularity he keeps the feelings of the audience under control and diminishes himself where it is needed. In this way, he maintains equality between himself and the villagers all

⁶² This device reminds one of films such as *Bicycle Thieves*, by De Sica, which depicted the expedients people had to invent in the aftermath of the War in order to survive.

through the narrative. The final laughter he wins demonstrates that the people are satisfied with the balance in the narrative and feel no disparity of power and status.

I believe Dino is working consistently to achieve solidarity. The insertion of negative touches about himself corrects the perception people might have had of Dino as someone who did things out of the ordinary, and allows him to be re-assimilated as a member of the community. Nowadays, Dino adds one new weakness in the story, thus reinforcing the self-disparaging quality of his narrative. One could ascribe this quality to Dino's own temperament, but the fact that he is telling a narrative that elicits laughter, raises questions about his purpose. Is he telling to provoke laughter for the community or for his own personal purposes? Personal purposes might include the need to renew the community's acceptance of him, especially after a long time during which they had not seen each other, and acceptance had not been renewed on the basis of simple daily actions and interactions.

Eliciting laughter through narratives of this kind then, could be a way of quickly assessing the feelings of the community-audience for him.

I do not wish to portray Dino as a self-conscious manipulator of other people's emotions. On the contrary, the very subtle mechanisms at work here are not signs of social inadequacy, but occur in each of us in many situations. Dino does not deal in social characteristics confined to a minority, but he uses stratagems learned by all; and he does so as a 'normal' member of the community would do. Are we not prone to be dismissive of a nice holiday we have just had? So, if coming back from Rome we are told "Lucky you, you went to Rome", it is very likely that we might answer by saying, "Oh yes, but it was raining all the time", or "But I felt such a fool because I could not understand a word of Italian", or similar, deploying as many "buts" as are needed to induce the person in front of us to relax in a smile and then laugh, *at us* – since we have put ourselves up as scapegoats to re-establish harmony – and finally reinstate us into our community of two by laughing *with us*.

When Dino came back from his honeymoon, with six pictures taken by a photographer, which he was distributing around, the eyes of the people might have been on him. Dino might have felt then that he was at risk of being perceived as aspiring to a higher status in life. Through this narrative, he contrived to re-insert

himself into the community, and there was no better proof of his success than the laughter his story caused. Most of all, the confirmation that he was accepted as a villager and that his narrative had achieved its purpose was in the words Maria addressed to him before he began the story: "Tell it, that's a good one!" (*Cuntla, c' l'è bèla!*"")

5.7 Group power play: laughing at the others.

We now approach the core of the community function of these stories. As explained in chapter 2, humorous stories were at one level used to preserve the image of the village and resist changes. They were, in a sense, a barrier against the outside. However, when we look more closely at the practices associated with the narratives, we discover that they raised discussions which often tended to challenge the values of the community itself.

Broadly speaking, this group of stories dealt with the anxiety caused by subverted expectations. These expectations were formed through the teaching of the older generations, which had told the young ones how they could expect the world to behave. But as the world was quickly changing, the younger generation encountered situations that had not been contemplated in old narratives. As a result, they developed an anxiety due to the lack of means to interpret and make sense of the new. Attempts were of course made to introduce new situations in the narratives; but this was invariably done through the language and modes of expression they had learned from the older generation. As a consequence, the resulting narratives do succeed in airing the new problems, but dress them in a system of meaning that was highly influenced by the concerns of traditional narrative and the worldview inherited from previous generations. Although we sense the future, we cannot but express it through the past. As Mannheim put it, "parody" – and I would add by extension any genre which relates to a situation which provokes anxiety – "must be cut of the same cloth as that which it parodies" (quoted by Seizer 1997: 63). That is, the very mindset we are trying to escape is the one that has formed all our means for challenging it. However hard we try to expose its faults, we inevitably confirm it, through our language, through the mental framework within which we operate, even by the structure associated with the genre of narrative we employ.

In the next sections, I will look in particular at how humorous narratives have been employed to explore such topics as relationships between men and women, between older and younger generations, and between outsiders and insiders. These three relationships form the major categories within which the stories can be grouped. The stories within each category represent numerous facets of the anxiety they address and embody different feelings caused by it. The purpose of each set of stories is not to resolve the problem, but to re-contextualise it, often by projecting its negative associations onto another set of circumstances, so that the community, suitably distanced from the problem area, can laugh more freely and make the ambiguity of the situation more bearable. The result is that problematic scenarios are periodically revisited in humorous narratives within frames that reproduce the traditional structures that might seem under threat.

5.8 Men and women.

In the third chapter of *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*, Bauman describes a group of men who were always “just teasin’ one another and playin’ jokes on one another” (Bauman 1986: 36). The group reminds one in many ways of the group of my informants in Frassinoro. However, at a closer look, the two are hardly comparable. The group analysed by Bauman was drawn together by leisure activity – fishing, hunting, playing dominoes – and not by belonging to the same community. The men in Bauman’s group were always meeting among themselves and were not interacting with the rest of a community. Most of all, they were not meeting in the presence of their women and they were the only audience of themselves most of the time. The stories of the Frassinoresi, on the contrary, relied heavily on the presence of the women as audience. The relationship between men and women is fundamental in understanding the character of laughter.

Before proceeding further I must declare certain basic assumptions. First, it is generally agreed in humour studies that in general “males engage in more laugh-evoking activity than females” (Provine 2000: 29). One only needs to recall one’s school days to remember that the funny person in one’s own class was almost certainly a boy.

Secondly, women are a very supportive audience:

Girls were more affected by the sex of their companion than were boys: girls laughed and smiled more in the presence of a boy than in the presence of a girl companion. Boys' laughter and smiling were, on the other hand, relatively unaffected by the sex of their companion (Foot and Chapman 1976: 205).

This statement refers to situations in which men and women are brought together, and not to a female only situation in which girls might 'get the giggles' for different reasons. It is important here to see laughter as a way to express assent to the group whose values are being reinforced by the narrative one laughs at. If we laugh at a joke, we accept the teller's point of view on the matter, reinforce his values and those of the group he represents. Applied to the relationship between male and female, this raises the question whether female laughter at the jokes in our corpus was expected by the males and elicited in order to gain confirmation of their own predominance. The relationship between male teller and woman hearer is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of the stories in the corpus that deal with married life. In principle, the story achieves its purpose of social control only if the teller can get the audience to laugh.

According to theories of incongruity, the overpowering woman and the sexually frustrated woman have always been among the main subjects of humour within the so called Battle of the Sexes theme. The humour, at first sight, lies in the fact that the normal relationship is inverted, so that the women rule the men in one instance and the women reveal instincts and frustrations which are usually more associated with men in the other. Obvious as this might seem, it would be mistaken to apply this crude formula to stories in a village context. For here the stories actually arise out of the reality of the village, and the presence of narratives about such matters is likely to be the expression of specific anxieties, arising from the real-life situation of the men and women of Frassinoro in the days when the stories were composed. I will begin by looking at narratives 20, 21 and 39 as a mutually dependent group. I believe that these stories address a problem felt by men and women in the village, who attempt to control it by working it into a narrative which is conservative by structure and motifs.

The couple Iusun and Cesira could have come out of the *Commedia dell'Arte*: a clumsy man with a bottle in his hand, a boasting woman prone to slapping her

husband. However, it is clear that this was just the fictional side of them, since, outside the context of the narratives, they are both described as quiet people, and an ordinary couple after all. This is also the impression we get from narratives in which Iusun and his wife appear, but where the attention is not on their married life. In narrative 19, for example, in which Iusun outwits the umbrella maker, Cesira asks for Iusun's help to solve the mystery of the 'newly painted door.' And Iusun sets off to solve the problem by saying, "I am going to check," with the solution to the problem already in his mind. The couple are in balance, according to the usual standards. The woman is not overpowering the man, but actually relies on his wit to solve the situation. She is behaving like a 'normal' woman.

Additionally, however, I believe that a few episodes that had certainly happened, including the one in which Cesira shook the frying pan in the air, and that in which Iusun was caught in a merry state in the bar, became one of the focal points of the village repertoire because they were functional for the rest of the community. These would have been related by Iusun out of a natural need to tell; but because they touched on, and symbolised, matters of urgent concern to the community they were 'adopted' by the village. For they provided a very functional way of addressing a problem which was not just a matter of frying pans, but a burning contemporary issue to my informants' generation. Subversion of power relationships in a couple had always existed, no doubt, but tended to be private. The 'superiority' of the man was often only a convention, while in reality the women were supporting the entire family establishment. The woman of the house was, not by chance, called *resdora* (lit. 'she who carries', 'she who supports'), both in the dialect of Frassinoro and in other dialects of the North of Italy. In addition to this, in the years in which the stories were composed, men were finding themselves dealing with women whose public image was changing and creating a social problem. The role of the woman in Frassinoro was slowly evolving and she was becoming increasingly different from, and especially more aware than, the women of earlier generations.

For those who could repeat Iusun's stories, the slap he received from his wife would symbolise a supremacy that was not physical but economic and of power. The reason why relationships between men and women in the village were changing, and women were acquiring a different power, was that during the long and regular

absences of men through seasonal emigration and during the war, the women, although still formally subject to the men, were visibly supporting the family on their own shoulders for most of the year. In addition to this, these women were doing paid work outside the village; this phenomenon reached its highest level in my informants' generation, arriving at the point where almost every woman left the parental house in her early teens. This meant that the women were seeing other places, acquiring different knowledge, earning money. Although, as all the interviewees remember, the girls in service never got to spend a penny of what they earned (interestingly enough the only money they could keep was the price of the ticket to go home – the price for the maintenance of the umbilical cord), they nevertheless supported the family with the money they sent home. And their money was often what made the difference, given that the men would sometimes come back from the *Macchia* without having received any money for the work of an entire winter.

The unprecedented possibility that a woman might influence a man's decisions had come about from the following simple reason. Until my informants' mothers' generation, a woman who wanted to leave the husband could not have done so, as she would have had nowhere to go. Her parents would probably have denied her shelter and convinced her to go back to her husband for fear of dishonour. But now, there was potentially another option. In one instance, a female informant told me she had refused to live in her parents-in-law's home after their wedding, while her husband was away at the *Macchia*. To convince her husband to make the decision of having a home of their own, she went back to Florence, in service, where the mistress who had sadly let her go, because she was getting married, had promised she "would have taken me back any time, with open arms". She could not cope with being "used", she said, in the in-laws's home, a "home that was not [hers]", and she preferred to go back to service. She made a choice which in previous times would have been heavily frowned upon. Alone and with no money, she left one day and did not come back until her husband walked to Florence and promised her a home of their own. Life in the parental home was difficult, and some women had had to cope with it for up to fifteen years, for economic reasons. Once able to have their own house, the women were definitely more protective and aware of their territory. The

house was their own ground, where they could finally make decisions. The houses they were finally able to buy after years of marriage had been paid for with their work as much as with their husbands'. This opened the way to more shared decisions in the house. Cesira was the stereotype of a woman who had already left her husband's family home and could now rule her own house. She would not have been able to behave so, had she had to live under the same roof with the elderly. In general, however, although women could see the examples of emancipation to one extent denied to their mothers, theirs was still a very patriarchal society and they all maintained they were still "a bit like slaves." The stories about Iusun and Cesira attempt to tackle these tensions in the distribution of power between men and women; I believe that, together with the other stories in this section, they show this ambivalence being resolved for the general balance of the community.

Narrative 39 portrays a Iusun who is physically overpowered by his wife. Dino well conveys the physical inferiority of the victim by immediately specifying that "he was completely bald" and later again, "he was completely bald, right?" Dino makes sure Iusun is seen as exposed in the very part that will be hit by the woman: "she gave him such a slap on his head! [laughter]." This narrative, as has been pointed out in discussing the unconscious fool, was functional for men in that it reinforced social stereotypes for men.

However, if it helped to confirm social values such as moderation in drinking, it nevertheless gave an image of a man who was bettered by a woman. A tension in the relationship between man and woman was still unresolved. So, if this narrative provided a model for avoidance, a role model was also needed embodying qualities a man could be proud of.

Narrative 39 calls for another narrative to counterbalance it, and Narrative 21, told by Alba, provides this balancing narrative. It starts very similarly to Dino's, but Alba goes on to verbalise the mockery that the men direct at Iusun, which was only implicit in Dino's version. Here the men publicly tease Iusun and try to make him admit that he has succumbed to his wife, with the implication that he has not behaved like a real man: "Ah, then last night, Giuseppe, you got hit by your wife, didn't you!?" "Yes, sure, she didn't dare to, because otherwise I would have..." "No, no you got hit!" This statement verbalises the opinion of the community of men, who

laugh at the protagonist in order to disaffiliate themselves from him, thus confirming their masculinity. But, at this point, Iusun answers back: "Eh, well, one needs to play at who's got more judgement", thus subverting the situation through wit. His riposte, while humorous, is also very significant. Iusun names a quality that was more important than physical strength, and which the men also admired: he claims to have exercised "judgement", an intellectual quality which, he suggests, was the superior weapon with which he could outwit the woman who sought to make him look small in the eyes of his male friends.

Physical inferiority is trumped by intellectual superiority. Iusun has not tried to challenge the facts about his relationship with his wife, and his wit does not subvert the power balance within his relationship. He has not eliminated the problem, as that cannot be done. For his narrative to be functional, the problem has to be kept in sight, but made fun of. Accordingly, Iusun's final punch-line invites us to look at the woman's increased power in a different light. Female predominance based on strength is indirectly explained as a consequence of the absence of 'judgement' and it is therefore adjudged as useless. The wife's superiority, in some sense, is not denied, but devalued. As a result, the man is no longer dominated and inadequate, but back in control of the relationship, thanks to his 'judgement', which allows him to make the decisions that will be less disruptive for the relationship. Narrative 22, where Cesira is depicted in all her irascibility, has the same function of confirming the stereotype of powerful but irrational woman.

Completing and confirming this image of the man who wins with words is Narrative 20, where the man explicitly uses wit to subjugate his wife, in front of his male friends. He draws attention to an element about her which was familiar to everyone, namely, that the woman has a runny nose, and then orders her to kiss him, in itself a sweet, but controlling request. The woman does not complain or answer back. So the man's triumph is assured. This last narrative establishes wit and intellect as the symbols of male superiority.

The good performance of wit as a mark of virility and masculinity has been noticed by several scholars (e.g. Bricker 1980: 413). The tension produced by ambiguity in relationships involving men and women is resolved by establishing wit, a most important male quality, as the key to the situation. As long as a man had this

supremacy, the woman might earn more and rule the house, but he still had the ability to leave her speechless. Because rationality, expressed by wit, was such a male quality, women were not supposed to reply to humour with humour. Proof that this was the case comes from the fact that Cesira did not have a narrative voice. She speaks within the narratives but she does not tell stories herself. She could not compete with the man on this ground. He was the one who got to do the telling.

In general, I was able to confirm that young women did not engage in humour production – a social feature that has been reported in many ethnographic studies in different cultures (Apte 1985: 79). In Frassinoro, the only genre allowed to women, apart from the folktale, was what the women called “*pettegolezzi*”, gossip. This was generally justified by saying that they could not enjoy the moments of relaxation necessary for the exchange of narratives. Olga once said that at *veglie*, her father used to tell the majority of stories, and people would go to their barn especially to listen to him, “because he had more rhetoric, he also had the gift of the well spoken word”. By contrast, Olga’s mother, who was also good at telling, used to tell tales which, in Olga’s own words, “were more for silly little women [*donnette*]”, and would not perform them at the *veglia*, but in the home. Interestingly, Apte observes that:

Men and women appear to have unequal status across cultures. By restricting the freedom of women to engage in and to respond to humour in the public domain, men emphasise their need for superiority. Men justify such restrictions by creating ideal role models for women that emphasise modesty, virtue, and passivity (Apte 1985: 81).

Emphasising the irrationality and intellectual inferiority of the women is one way of justifying restrictions on women’s rights. The message is ‘they cannot talk humour because they would not be able to’, while the truth is that the restriction is used to preserve an area in which the woman is not permitted to compete with the man.

It is interesting to see that, far from taking these jokes amiss, women laughed at them, thus confirming the interpretation of male-female relationships which the men had depicted in the narrative. Their laughter was a sign of acknowledgement that the men were the leading group in that particular situation, and that the women accepted

this stereotyping of the irrational woman and the witty man. Provine poses the following questions:

[...] While male speakers are leading jokesters, and females are leading laughers and consumers of humour, what is actually being communicated in their noisy display? Might laughter be performed by a subservient individual, most often female, as a vocal display of compliance, subordination, or solidarity with a more dominant group member? (Provine 2000: 29)

I would stress the suggestion that humour may be a way of testing alliances, and the notion that we may laugh as an act of solidarity with a dominant individual or group. It is understandable that, in a situation where A is the boss and B and C are employees, if A mocks B, C will very likely associate with A in laughter at B, and possibly B will do the same. However, in such a hierarchical group, it is very unlikely that the opposite would happen. If B suddenly mocks A, C will very likely give B a black look, thus forcing him to stop. On this understanding, to give laughter is to concede affiliation, and we normally do it in order to affiliate with what we consider the leading party. As Provine notices, “insights about the social role of laughter can be gleaned from laugh patterns of people holding different social rank within a group.” Humour can be an important agent of social control and exercising it can be a way of getting people to accept messages which would have otherwise been rejected.

It is not surprising that a leading group initiates humour as a way of preserving itself, as this has been long recognised as a controlling strategy. In the Middle Ages, the Church itself promoted a system of humorous *exempla* within its teaching. Far from shaking the roots of its doctrine, this was actually providing a shield “contre la sensation de vertige devant une accélération incontrôlable de l’histoire.” Humour defended traditional values and patterns, helping to promote consensus for the hardest rules by making people accept them gladly through laughter (Horowitz-Menache 1994: 76).

In Frassinoro, by according laughter to the stories about irrational women and witty men, the women were implicitly communicating their acceptance of this stereotyping. The dominant group is confirmed in its dominance when the laughter of

those outside the group attests to the validity of the norms that it has declared. Goodchilds noticed that wit was chosen by both men and women as the faculty that had the most influence on them. Both genders recognised that out of a number of people, the witty one is the one who influences them most and with whom they would most readily associate (Goodchilds 1959: 266-268).

However, this tendency to submission did not apply to all ages. The group interviews showed women who were at ease now telling stories, whereas the very same women had not been in the position to tell the same stories when they were in their twenties and thirties. It was clear that elderly women had more narrative rights than young ones. The only humorous narrative, apart from the ones of the clumsy exploits in service, had been told to my informants by elderly women, Menga and Lucetta. Apte (1985) and Sykes (1966: 189-190), among others, have confirmed this change with age. Here is what Apte says:

Age and the resultant changes in a woman's body seem to be other important variables affecting humour. Ethnographic evidence suggests that as women age and reach menopause, they seem to grow bolder, start competing with men openly and freely in all types of humour, and often prove their equals. In many societies men seem to accept this change[d] status in elderly women, perhaps because such women no longer bear children and the sex-specific norms of behaviour are relaxed for them (Apte 1985: 79).

Because the older women did not have to stay within their role any longer, Menga and Lucetta were able to measure themselves against men on the male home territory of humour and wit.

Menga's narratives are very illuminating as examples of how narratives can weave moments of rebellion into conservative narratives that neutralise potential protest.

I collected narrative 6, in which Menga complains about her husband who is praying instead of going to bed on the night of their wedding, in another version, which is not included in the corpus but which I will report here. What we may term Narrative 6a was collected from Sister Costanza, who was a niece of Menga's. Suor Costanza tells the story very differently, and I do not believe that the differences are

due only to her own need to communicate her personal standpoint through the narrative. Here is her version, repeating what she had heard as a teenager:

6a) The wedding of uncle Massimo and aunt Menga, were you told what they did? Well, it was on that day that she got impressed in her mind what the Holy Spirit was. When they got married, they went home, they went to the bedroom, it was the time of the novena of the Holy Spirit. And so my uncle said, *"Now, before we undress and go to bed, we'll recite the novena of the Holy Spirit"*. Only, he knew it by heart, my aunt did not know it at all, because she had never done the novena of the Holy Spirit. *She says, "Well then, we kneel down and he begins to recite the novena of the Holy Spirit, but I did not know it! I was doing bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, while he spoke it, because I did not want to give the bad impression that I did not know it!"* Ha, ha, ha, ha...

[I laugh]

C. *She says, "'Cause then I was even afraid that he might say, Hey you, then I don't want you anymore!"*

L. and C. Ha, ha, ha.

C. She too was extremely entertaining. Have you understood? On the night of the wedding! You can understand now why they were called Patriarchi.

This version is more demure than narrative 6. Indeed there is no direct reference to frustrated desire, although Suor Costanza does comment on the inappropriateness of the behaviour on the wedding day, "On the night of the wedding!" It is very likely that Suor Costanza heard the story within the home environment and that the elderly people, older than Menga, were present too. Therefore she had to find a delicately allusive narrative appropriate to someone in her position. Narrative 6a is far less explicit, and Menga is made to use quite a few devices to communicate her distress. First of all, she portrays herself as inadequate and as a fool, who does not know the Novena and ends up having to mumble: "I did not know it! I was doing bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, bla". I think it very unlikely that Menga did not know the novena, as it was something everyone knew. A possible reason for an exaggerated portrayal of pietistic inadequacy is hinted at in the following line, "I was even afraid that he might say, 'Hey you, then I don't want you anymore!'". Menga is made to fear rejection on ground of devotional inferiority and inadequacy. But the fear of being rejected, which she verbalised as a matter of inadequate religious training is actually

also a subtle way of exposing the fact that she had felt physically rejected when her husband decided to recite his prayers instead of coming to bed.

The story, as reflected in narrative 6 and 6a, cleverly moves the attention from one issue to another, but the bottom line seems to be that the rejected woman becomes self-analytical, finds a way to portray herself as inadequate, and somehow ends up justifying the possibility of a rejection. Of course, the story is also a commentary on the high level of religiosity in the husband's family. So the great discrepancy Menga portrays between her religious knowledge and that of her husband, "Only, he knew it by heart, my aunt did not know it at all, because she had never done the novena of the Holy Spirit", is possibly an exaggeration of her ignorance which is meant to make his Christian zeal and knowledge look exaggerated and hence ridiculous too. I believe that narrative 6a was a more private version of narrative 6, and was conceived especially for family use. As Sister Costanza remarks at the end of the story, "You can understand why they were called Patriarchi". Sister Costanza believes that the nickname Patriarchi was assigned to the family because of their fervent religiosity. For this reason, I think that a narrative such as 6a, could be a way of taking with irony the excessive place that religion and recitation of prayers had in the family, a thing which could not be changed, but which could be made easier to cope with, through humour. Narrative 6a could be told as a story that helped coping with the family environment. A possible introduction to it could have been "You think that you have to pray too much, well listen to what happened to me on my wedding night...". The extreme situation of the wedding night helps make all other situations trivial in comparison. Proof of this possible function of narrative 6a is in Sister Costanza's remark "Have you understood? On the night of the wedding!", with which she drew attention to the incongruity of the situation. Not surprisingly, Sister Costanza's spontaneous account of the story came during a conversation in which she had just told me that life in the convent for her was not hard, because she used to pray just as much at home. It is interesting that she used narrative 6a as an illustrative anecdote to make me understand the extent of what she was trying to convey.

Narrative 6, by contrast, is a narrative for all women, or so I believe. Its function is less localised than that of 6a. All the issues connected with fear of rejection and

inadequacy, and also the exposure of the married situation, are worked into a more didactic narrative, which makes sense for women, by working roles and stereotypes into a structure that reinforces their values.

I am inclined to think that narrative 6 is more recent than narrative 6a and that it started to be told as a story around the time when my informants heard it. This was a moment in time at which two important things coincided. First of all Menga was at an advanced age, and secondly, she was watching the women of her children's and her grandchildren's generations beginning married life. In addition to her age then, which allowed her to use humorous narratives, it is very likely that the presence of the young people also helped to create a subtle context for the creation of this story.

I believe that Menga told the narrative with the young women in mind, interpreting the effects of increased intimacy between men and women and other changes in their relationships. A tangible sign of these changes was the fact that my informants were the first generation to use the informal *tu*, instead of the formal *voi*, to address their spouse. While their children still addressed them with *voi*, and often still do today, between husband and wife they could use *tu* on a regular basis. I do not know whether Giacobbe makes Menga address her husband as *tu*, in the story, or if this was a locution used by Menga too:

"Well then, I hope you (tu) don't believe that it's the Holy Spirit that is going to come with me?!"

Given the conservative character of punch-lines I believe it can be assumed that Menga used the locution *tu* and that Giacobbe reported the punch-line as she had told it. This line is very explicit, and almost blasphemous. Although Menga probably did not describe herself as feeling "desire", she could nevertheless be relatively explicit about her expectations and her frustrations. She was confronting the man, now apparently without fear of rejection. She was in an environment now, among young couples, where she could draw on the new confidence between husband and wife retrospectively, to retell her story of her early married life through the more explicit kind of register couples could use in the present. However, I do not believe that Menga was telling it for herself, nor that she was simply trying to voice women's frustrations with their men's 'tiredness', as funny as this stereotype might have been.

What Menga has done is more subtle, and was, I believe, partly guided by the fact that she was borrowing a genre whose storyability had been defined by men. For we should recall that, according to Maria, narrative 7, which is almost identical to Menga's, used to be told by the male protagonist of the story. Conceivably, Giacobbe and this man gave a more male slant to the story; however, Maria did not object to the version of the story her husband told, and she confirmed to me on a later visit that Menga used to be just as explicit.

So Menga portrays herself as highly impatient: "They went to bed, and she quickly, quickly undresses." Then comes the picture that is almost blasphemous, when she suggests that the Holy Spirit might be her partner that night. By contrast, the husband is portrayed in a totally peaceful state of inner balance, untouched by human concerns. He was "on his knees, reciting his prayers", he was "reciting the rosary." Again, "She looks for him and he was kneeling down on a chair, near a painting, praying". These two descriptions in the space of a very short anecdote echo the descriptions of irrational woman and intellectual man given by Iusun in his stories.

Narrative 7, whose author was not named by the interviewees, also portrays an impatient woman, prey to frustrated desire. She is far too impatient, so much so that she takes it out on the animals: "poor beasts, they were all lying tired... 'For God's sake!' she said, 'you too!' She picked up a stick", and threatens to beat them. By comparison, the man was calm. The frustrated, instinctual and impatient woman is thus opposed to the cerebral and spiritual man who could find refuge in his intellect, according to the model of male intellectual superiority. However, narratives 6 and 7 also confirm other characteristics of the male. Narrative 7 displays another quality of the ideal man, that he is a hard worker. This explains his 'tiredness' and produces a justification for it, which makes the woman seem like the offender and no longer like the victim. The underlying message seems to be that, by performing his duty as a provider, the man tires himself out, and could reject his wife without being accused of failing in his duty as a spouse. And rejection is, of course, one of the most powerful weapons of control in a relationship.

In narrative 6, Menga also stresses another important side of men, their religious devotion. However, while in narrative 6a she seemed to use the story to communicate

a personal and general message about the difficulties of excessive zeal, the audience for narrative 6 had changed, and possibly also Menga's purpose in telling the story. Now, in front of a larger audience, possibly with many young couples among them, Menga may have found herself telling it in order to validate certain social patterns and roles. In this case she was probably reinforcing religious zeal as a quality in a man. As a result, both narrative 6 and narrative 7, far from containing a rebellion against the men, were actually presenting justification and powerful reasons for the rejection of the woman on the part of the man. One was God, who is not to be put after anyone, and the other was the hard work which sustains the family for the winter. The problem of lack of intimacy between men and women, after long absences which could be traumatic for the men, must have been a common situation, or the stories would not have remained in the repertoire. And the fact that these episodes were storyable and appreciated is proved also by the joke Dino tells, in narrative 4, in which the situation is very similar to the one in narratives 6 and 7, although it concerns an older couple. Their continued popularity meant that they were possibly helping people cope with the problem and allowed men and women to articulate negative feelings for each other and find sympathy through humour. And when told by men, as it is the case for narrative 7 and narrative 4, the stories allowed men to exorcise fear of personal failure and confirm wit as their weapon of superiority. Hence, also in narrative 4, the 'tired' man wins through wit:

"He was almost asleep, she, she shook him well and he opened one eye. He says, "And what about this one now!?" She says, "This is the nightdress my mother made me". He says, he says, "Well, but then, since she made it, she could have ironed it a bit!"

On the other hand, when Menga told narrative 6, I believe that she was sending a message to the women, along the lines of, "Yes it can happen, but as long as he is a good man, do not bother too much". Menga was somehow also teaching them that it is normal to experience frustration, and one must express it subtly and not confrontationally. The first duty of a woman was that of keeping the couple together. As Maria once said, during a discussion about modern couples:

But we would get married knowing for sure that there would be sacrifice....there was satisfaction, and so on, there was affection, but there was sacrifice. We knew that things could not always go well, and we had to remain there, to try to ...how can I say, to mend [she uses *rammendare*, to darn] the situation, get back together, to sympathise with each other, to understand each other. Now, at the first obstacle, there's a divorce.

'Mending' then, was the main duty of a woman. The women kept the community together. The prospect of many women behaving like the girl who went back to Florence was potentially a threat to the community, and indeed it is still felt as such. Menga's narratives, as well as narrative 7, were implicitly designed to control the threat of such independent behaviour, by laughing at the woman's desire and her incipient rebellion. And mending is what Menga seems to achieve with the story. She does not deny the crisis, but resolves it through humour and acceptance. Menga's story talked the women through the dynamics of married life with the help of humour. In particular, it talked them through one of the most delicate, and "shocking" moments for the women, the first night of the wedding. Young women dreamt of the wedding day, and were always taught to wish for marriage and children:

Those were all things that came naturally, because we followed in the footsteps of our parents and girls unfortunately went to service then to work, to be able to get married then and raise a family and stop. We didn't have dreams or things, because back then it was like that...[...]

Well back then that [having a family] was the dream of girls, at least as far I and my times are concerned, let's say. Then, slowly, almost everything changed, because then they could afford to study more, and they aspired to become teachers, and something more. But in my days there wasn't that....there weren't any possibilities and so it was that [the dream of a family]

We followed that procedure there, I mean it was the aspiration of getting to forming a family, because there weren't other things.

The construction of a family was all they looked forward to:

Onelia: Well, back then it was more, more beautiful because we got there [to the wedding], we had that longing to see what was there, what wasn't there, what it was like, what it wasn't like...

However, they got there without having an idea of what intimacy could be like, as they were always with the parents when in the company of the fiancé. As Onelia told me: "I, for example, spoke⁶³ to Fernando, my husband, for nine years, right! It's true there was the War inbetween, but we were never left alone. They [parents or a relative] would be in the distance, but always watching." These monitored times of engagements had as a result that "then, afterwards we got there [at the married life] in a bit of a shock, let's say". When Onelia says that they got "there" in a shock, "there" does not only mean married life, but also the experience of intimacy in itself, given that before then they had hardly kissed their beloved. There was "curiosity", which many maintain was the main reason why people looked forward to marrying, and fear as well. These two elements were contained in the speeches the father gave to the daughter on the day of the wedding, when she was accompanied to her new home. The bedroom, as Giacobbe once told me, was sometimes described to girls as the room of "joys and pains". This was generally done by the girl's father, by tradition, during a ritual discourse with which the girl used to be introduced to her future bedroom, soon after the wedding: "This is the room of joys and pains..." On the day of the wedding, the father handed the daughter to the husband for good and the girl was catapulted into a new reality, full of expectations which, up to that moment, had been created only by narratives she had heard.

Menga's narrative seemed to provide a chance for unmarried women to look inside that room in advance, and seeing what was in it in a comic light, thus making the expectation less worrying. It could also provide a way of re-visiting the past years of married life for those who had been wives for some time, offering relief from built-up resentments and, at the same time, providing a source of meaning for their past and present struggles. The 'message' is about the unavoidability of social restraints. Menga further reinforced this point with humour, by telling another little

⁶³ This is how people often refer to the time before the wedding, since they were only allowed to have a conversation.

narrative which provided a link to even earlier generations. As Maria added at the end of narrative 6, Menga used to finish this story by revealing that, on the following morning, she confided her frustration to her mother: "*She said, 'Always like this mamma?' 'Oh yes', she says, 'Menga, always like this!'*" This remark (to which I refer as Narrative 6b) reassures women indirectly that they are engaged in a common struggle. In this context, Menga's introduction of the cross-generational dimension gained additional importance because verbal communication was rare on these matters. Many women told me they did not want to complain to their mother, so that she would not suffer and also because "you knew she had been through even worse experiences". Narratives such as narrative 6 bridged that gap in communication.

Proof of the ultimately conservative tendency of Menga's narrative was the fact that her husband used to laugh under his moustache when she told the story, thus validating both her humorous interpretation and the image of the religious and hard-working man presented in it. This was in itself a valuable symbol for the young men too, given that Menga's husband was the Patriarca, the great storyteller, one of the most respected men in the village! If these situations had been faced by such a respected married couple, then the young men could draw a comforting lesson about virility and gender roles, while the young women could be consoled by the fact that they were living the life of many women before them. And indeed, this is how women often told me they used to console themselves, by thinking of how their mother's life seemed even harder than theirs: "At least we had a bed and a roof, my mother used to wake up every morning covered in snow!"

Menga, at her advanced age could weave meaning for all the young women by means of her narrative, and she did it by utilising the narrative tools of the men. The stories of Iusun and of Menga end up confirming male supremacy on the level of wit and "judgement". They teach that the female is dependent on the man for guidance, just like Prezzemolina was in the traditional folktale the girls used to be told as children. In addition to this, Menga confirms that the man who is devout and a hard worker is a valuable guide, both for the wife and for the community. And all was sealed with a laugh.

Quite different from Menga's story was Lucetta's spicy account of her wedding night. Lucetta gave the men some funny spicy material, faithful to their tradition of

humour. The only reason why Lucetta could tell her story that way, especially in the presence of men, was that she has reached an older age. She was obviously aware of what was storyable among the boys. She could handle the male genres. Although, as I shall suggest in the next section, I feel her story had a serious level, I do not believe it was primarily didactic in purpose, but it certainly made a good point by showing how women could engage in humour by borrowing stories that, up to then, had been exclusively male.

This genre of stories had been designed by men and it had become storyable according to the requirements of men. If women wanted to express themselves on the level of humour, at least some of them were clearly drawn to imitate the genre, which had been initiated by the men. However, because it had been designed to articulate men's anxieties and preoccupations, the genre carried with it motifs that were not useful for expressing women's preoccupations. If Menga was able, to some extent, to weave a narrative that spoke to women (although she ends up reinforcing male values), Lucetta seems to have used humour only for entertaining purposes, so that her stories about married life do not speak to women at all, and she finds herself telling stories at the bar, or outside it, to a community of men. In other words, she had not developed a genre that was significantly expressive of female preoccupations.

But could such a development take place at all, if (as we concluded earlier) humour is used by the group in power? It is important to recall that I am considering situations in which men and women are drawn together, and not instances of exclusively female gatherings, during which it is very likely that gender-specific kinds of narratives were exchanged. What has been said so far is by no means a feminist reflection, nor a gender-related point – I am not dealing with this side of the narratives⁶⁴ – but a deeply genre-related consideration. What I wish to propose, is that genre conventions come to us within a structure which reflects the intents and frame of mind of the group that has monopolised the genre, of those from whom we learned the genre.

⁶⁴ The lack of feminist theories in this discussion is due to the choice I have made in this work not to 'use' the narratives in the corpus to prove one specific theory or to interpret them through one particular lens. The focus has been kept on the narratives and their uses.

It is, I suggest, as if we went to buy a kit for putting on our own play. With the kit we get a stage and costumes for a male character and a female character. Those will very likely include trousers for him and a skirt for her. These elements, which are part of the traditional representation of men and women, would affect our choices even at the level of the content of the play. If the genre one wished to use was tied to a pre-determined context, then as a new user one would hardly be able to express oneself without reference to the context.

In conclusion then, if I had to summarise narrative 6 I would say it is about a frustrated woman who is disappointed by her husband's lack of interest in her. While the unfolding events seem to be leading towards a condemnation of the weakness of the man, the story – because of its genre conventions – ends up as a reinforcement of male predominance. And, although the final punch-lines change the balance of power, they do not subvert, but actually re-assert the social values and roles which had initially seemed to be negated in the story: "Far from exerting a disorganising or transformative impact [these] jokes often serve to reinscribe the very conventions they blatantly taunt" (Seizer 1997: 63).

5.9 Young and old.

Another broad opposition which seemed to generate a joking relationship in the village was that existing between old and young people (my informants' generation). There was humour directed at the elderly, and the people I spoke to confirmed that the elderly could not but take it good-naturedly. Even rough practical jokes were accepted by the older generation: it was as if in so doing they were passing the power to the new generation. In one instance, Onelia and Fernando said that a woman of their parents' age had been slapped by some young men, just as a joke.

Something very similar was observed by Radcliffe-Brown in East African tribes, where humour and insults are exchanged between people of different generations, in which one is considered to "exercise discipline." He notices that, when looking at such joking relationships, we must consider that, "in the flow of social life through time, in which men are born, become mature, and die, the grandchildren replace their grandparents" (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 201). It is my feeling that in Frassinoro, jokes and practical jokes at the expense of the elderly were a codified way of

acknowledging a rite of passage between the two generations. So, if in the previous section I argued that humour was essentially a male prerogative, it seems to me that one can add that it was mainly a prerogative of the productive male, that is the generation responsible for supporting the family. I believe that wit and humour were used to negotiate with the elderly the hierarchy of positions within the community and to facilitate transfer of power between the generations. If the point of jokes exchanged among different generations is “the pretence at ignoring the difference of age” between them (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 202), then we can see that joking allows the passage of power by creating a temporary space in which the two generations are on the same level in society. By convention then, the young generation wins on the level of wit and establishes its superiority, thus re-establishing the disparity in the power relationship. After all, in the *complimenti*, the pre-wedding ritual discussed in Chapter 2, the young man, aided by members of his party, won the hand of the young woman eventually by beating her father at the level of words and wit. It was also a matter of endurance, in our example it was the young one who gave in last, thus proving his staying power. A narrative in the corpus which is reminiscent of this ritual is narrative 12, where Giuggi succeeds, through a *battuta*, in accompanying Nice to a dance. It is a short punch-line story, which strongly reminds one of the ceremony of the *complimenti*. Indeed, the conversation between Giuggi and Nice’s elderly mother takes place on the threshold and is about allowing the daughter to leave with him. Eventually, Giuggi wins, because his dexterity with words has succeeded in turning the elderly woman around – or possibly she only pretended to be offended by Giuggi’s remark, as part of the joke. The girl is allowed out and, once again, wit has crossed a threshold. The same situation could not have happened between a young man and an elderly man. That would have been an example of a situation that Radcliffe-Brown names an “asymmetrical joking relationship”, in which the elderly man could joke with the young, but the young could not reply with wit, and would certainly not have initiated it. Not surprisingly, even in the *complimenti*, the young man could not address the old man on his own, but had to be accompanied by older relatives.

If exchange of wit between old men and young men was rare, the playing of practical jokes at the expense of the elderly was very common. Even rough jokes

could be played on them without incurring sanctions, apart from some shouting. I believe that narrative 9, the practical joke played on Canacc, contains an example of challenging the elderly through humour. In this joke, Canacc was the means to an end, since the purpose of the plotting in narrative 9 was that of hearing Canacc utter blasphemies. One could say that the fabrication of this story began from the end, for, as Dino remarks: "Because he, he had said to Giorg, Giuggi's father, 'because like this we can hear Canacc telling blasphemies', because he was one who told blasphemies like I cannot even begin to tell you!" Dino's father, like everyone else in the village, knew that Canacc would react in his usual way: yelling blasphemies that could be heard all around. All Dino's father had to do was create a cause for the certain end. Blasphemies were indeed a 'forbidden' thing, although used by many people. However, there was a fascination with the person who could periodically fill his mouth with forbidden words. The element of plotting in this story was not just aiming to produce laughter, but also to challenge a system of belief. It caused the blasphemies to be uttered in a situation in which the sin of blasphemy was relegated to a second level and laughter purged it of its associations with sin and evil (for evil was considered to be in store for the blasphemer).

I think this narrative provides a counter-blast to well-established attitudes expressed in other narratives which are traditionally not humorous. In a very Catholic society such as Frassinoro had been, blasphemous cursing was very badly thought of in the community. In one particularly well-known legend in the area, cursing was the cause of great fear. I collected this legend in many versions, and people refer to it as the story of the *Madonnina di San Giovanni*⁶⁵, which, according to the legend, had been built in the woods after a man had met the devil in that place. The *Madonnina* was a thanksgiving for the life that was saved, and was also there to protect the area (one through which people passed very often, when they were working in the fields).

I have encountered various forms of the legend from different informants. In the version given to me by a lady who was 104 years old when I interviewed her in 2004, the reason why the man had met the devil was that, after an accident at his working place, he had burst out into blasphemies. The cursing had made the devil

⁶⁵ Votive pillar, with a statue of the Virgin. People often refer to these pillars, which are still numerous in the mountains, as simply *Madonnina*, but in the standard language they are normally referred to as *Maestà*.

appear. But in other versions I collected, the tellers tended to retreat from making the devil's appearance the direct result of the blasphemy, and added other reasons for the apparition, while also making sure I understood that they did not believe it had occurred, merely that the man thought he had seen the devil, because he was so scared. Alba, for example, mentions the blasphemy, but stresses another cause:

A coachman who had to cross this, this, it was like a ditch, a brook, and the mules did not want to pass, and so they were cursing there, there were some coachmen [laugh] and, at some point, he said "May the devil come to help me!" And a person, something, appeared and the mules moved.

The cursing is still there, but the motivation is blurred, as it seems that other people are cursing and not the man who saw the devil. The reason why the devil appears now is that the man actually invoked the devil. It was a conscious act and the devil's appearance is somehow more 'understandable'. The message that those who tell blasphemies will see the devil has disappeared. Indeed, the rejection of the belief that cursing could cause the devil to appear is subtly contained in Alba's version.

As a result, Narrative 9 seems to provide a comic counter-blast to the above narratives. Cursing, despite the religiosity of the people, was very common among men. Given this apparent paradox, it was natural for stories to emerge in which violent cursing had occurred but nothing outward had happened, to challenge old fears and beliefs. I feel that the popularity of humorous narratives about blasphemers (for narrative 9 was not the only one I heard) was reactionary in this sense. The humorous narrative stands in a dialectical relationship with the old legend, acting as the counter-narrative and containing a challenging contemporary voice. For this reason, the practical joke and the resulting narrative could seem like an example of "the crucial process of social digestion and elimination" (Goody 1968: 30-31), which I have described in Chapter 2. The narrative serves the purpose of challenging an old precept which is no longer functional for a society that was tending increasingly but covertly to abandon the concept of sin and sense of guilt as social regulators. In fact, although people can say nowadays that they rejected some of the models and beliefs transmitted by the elderly, they could not say so when their parents and grandparents were alive. The elderly always had the last word. The only way of subverting these

institutionalised beliefs was through humour and, in particular, humorous counter-narratives that did not attack the issue directly. Of course, one could also argue that these stories had a protective function for the community, a way of exorcising through laughter a habit which was still seen, at least sub-consciously, as dangerous in as much as it was an offence to God and against one of the Commandments. In another version of the same narrative, the man in the end saved himself because of the many rosaries he said. As Maristella said, "They [the elderly] thought it was the devil, because then he said so many rosaries that he had his life saved because of them."

If telling the rosary was a way of chasing evil away, laughter too could act as a shield or protection. The cause and means of this laughter was the fool or scapegoat. People projected their sins onto him by making him do the forbidden thing. And through laughter, they symbolically expelled him and their sins from the community. An example of the fool being used as a scapegoat to exorcise community fears occurs in narrative 25. Here Giuggi is prodded during the rosary, i.e. at a moment when he should be silent. He has been threatened with being sent out, and expelled from the group. But he cannot resist. His inability to stay silent is, of course, what people had counted on. Indeed I would suggest that the choice of the place and situation for this joke had been suggested not only by its comic possibilities, but also by an impulse to question rules and challenge traditional precepts. The narrative seems to embody a need to 'play with fire' and, for this purpose, the fool was the ideal means: he could be sent first, in the vanguard, to 'flirt with danger'.

The humorous narratives about people breaking sin-related rules, such as narratives 9 and 25, provided an opposing voice to legends such as that of the *Madonnina di San Giovanni*, standing in a sort of dialogic tension with them. When told and retold, the humorous narratives mounted a challenge to the belief that certain actions would invoke the devil. Since these humorous narratives were about contemporary happenings and were an expression of the community's interaction with the real world, it is highly appropriate that they should become the counter-narratives to pious legends, because these legends were the main vehicle used by the community to transmit and perpetuate the belief system and traditional values which the humorous narratives were trying to challenge.

Again, we noticed in regard to the relationship between men and women, the fact that the elderly did laugh at these practical jokes and at the narratives resulting from them, meant that they acknowledged the motivation underlying the narratives. Their laughter was a concession made by the older generation to the young, a way of validating a change in belief. Reconsideration of sin and sin-related punishments was an urgent issue soon after the Second World War, when the Church began a process of 'relaxation' whereby some actions or omission that had been considered sins up to then, were suddenly deleted from the list. Doctrinal changes of this sort can lead to uncertainty and angst among ordinary parishioners. If this was the case in Frassinoro, then the humorous narratives of the new generation may perhaps be seen as a way of making sense of this fluidity in the definition of what constituted sin.

In addition to practical jokes, the 'young' generation began to tell a number of narratives about the illiteracy of the elderly, or about their inability to deal with technology, by contrast with the facility enjoyed by the young generation. Hidden at first, but emerging gradually after a number of interviews, were the stories about the letters from the Front or from the lovers who were away from home. Most of these stories are about people of the previous generation trying to write, resulting in letters that were "funny, they seemed like jokes". If, as sometimes happened, only one out of a group of three men who worked together at the *Macchia* could write, he would be asked to write a letter for all three. To save money for the stamp "they did not use to write [he means send] a letter each, they would write one letter [envelope] among three of them, and they took turns to pay for the stamp". So, when the envelope arrived in the village it concerned three families at least: "when it [envelope] arrived at my mother's, we brought the two letters to the other two women". And as the letters travelled: "We kids read it on purpose, we read them, right, because we wanted to know the silly things they said". When they were young boys and girls my informants would "pass [the stories] around, to laugh, to laugh, ha, ha, ha, they went all around, [...] around the community, yes, yes. 'Eh, so and so wrote', ha, ha, ha..." Then, these reading sessions were recounted around the village and turned into short narratives.

Everyone in Martino's generation could write and count. School for them was a more normal part of life. This disparity in literacy meant that the elderly often

depended on the young people, even children, to have things read. This instantly created an ambiguous situation, in which the balance of power and control between old and young was suddenly under threat.

Anna remembers that these “half jokes”, were told to her as a young girl, by her mother and the elderly: “We were young guys and so on, but our elders used to tell [these stories] to us...[and] then we laughed!” Most of these “mistakes” are hard to translate as they play on mis-spellings that make words look like quite different-sounding words in a humorous way. Thus, for example, the following example plays on the fact that the word for ‘hearts’, *cuori*, has been mis-spelled as *curi*, which means nothing in itself but strongly suggests the word *culi*, a not too polite word for ‘bottoms’. And, of course, the idea of two bottoms in love is still most hilarious:

Once I remember that he wrote to my sister-in-law, her sister, whom he liked: “We are like two *curi* in love”, instead of *cuori*! Ha, ha, ha. (Martino)

Connected with these stories, are, in my mind, the ones about elderly people having hard times with new technology. Some stories were told to me about old ladies being unable to turn off the light, and trying to blow on the light bulb. Another one told of an old lady who told someone who was criticising a television character, to speak softly, as the people in the television set could have heard. This derision of the older generation was a tool used by the young to define themselves as the new leading generation, who could lead because they knew how to survive in the new world. The old person symbolises the past and the stories about them struggling with innovations imply that the new generation has got a grasp of it and is therefore ready to lead. The old person is not treated disrespectfully, as the laughter is full of sympathy; but there is a rejection of conditions that belonged to the past generations, which the new generation wants to overcome.

Here the humour acts as a bridge. It gestures sympathetically towards the past, showing proper respect, but its attitude towards the future is revolutionary, announcing the demise of the old way of interpreting the world. If people could laugh about this, it was because they were almost over it and at ease with new technology. However, I stress ‘almost’, because if the stories needed to circulate, it

was certainly because there was some anxiety about technology on the part of the young people too. Hidden behind mockery of the circumstances of the elderly, they could vent their own unsuccessful attempts to handle technology. In this case the stories would function as a “coping behaviour” (Woods 1983: 122), the purpose of which is to project their own puzzlement in the face of rapid technological changes onto the generation that is about to bow out, thereby associating the problem with those who seem to have an obvious reason for struggling, i.e. their age.

As Davies observes about ethnic jokes, “by making fun of peripheral and ambiguous groups they reduce ambiguity and clarify boundaries or at least make ambiguity appear less threatening” (Davies 1982: 383). I believe we can think of the elderly as a peripheral group – e.g. as peripheral to society viewed as a productive chain. Indeed our corpus of stories carries the mark of a period of technological changes. Three stories in it deal with cameras and photographs, which were just beginning to be used in the village. Projecting fear of failures onto the older generation or on the comic butt, and making fun of them, could be a strategy to keep the image of the leading group free from the taint of failure or the suggestion of flawed effectiveness, which could damage the self-image of the group.

5.10 Insiders and outsiders.

We may now turn to another example of how communities of laughter reorganise themselves (Sollors 1986: 132). Once upon a time, when confronted with outsiders, all the people were villagers, regardless of gender and age. The stories to be discussed next present an interesting alternation between feelings of superiority and feelings of inferiority in relation to the outsider. Interestingly, both inferiority and superiority are conveyed by means of the speech, or the lack of it. In other words, this is another example of control through the power of words. The stories embody both reinforcement of group values and characteristics and demystification of the outside through exaggerated treatment of the inadequacy felt by someone leaving the village.

Interestingly, we find an old friend in a brand new role as the voice of this resistance movement, since Iusun acts as the main ambassador of the Frassinorese superiority to the outsider. Iusun’s stories tell of situations in which the villagers

function well. Interestingly they are also situations in which Iusun functions well, unlike the ones the people used to tell of him and his wife. Iusun was particularly skilled at finding the right material for he had the knack of choosing episodes that worked to the advantage of the community, and also cast him in a good light. With narratives 17, 18, 19 and 20, Iusun reacts against narratives such as 39 and 21, where he is the victim of his wife. The way in which he reacts is by constructing narratives about his life away from home, or outside his married life. In these narratives, his wife may be there as a character, but no longer as his antagonist. He succeeds, above of all, in moving people's attention away from his wedding situation. Away from home, travelling around neighbouring villages, or dealing with a stranger, he becomes a symbol of the Frassinorese who wins outside.

In narrative 17, Iusun's humour targets the priest. The narrative, in this case, succeeds in transferring one of the things he himself used to be blamed for onto another character, the priest. Now the priest is the one who has the habit of drinking. This narrative was indeed a storyable event, because it did not target a villager. As mentioned before, one hardly had the right to tell stories about somebody else's faults, if one was guilty of the same vice. The main reason why Iusun could tell this story was that the priest was considered an outsider, and not a real member of the community. Projecting faults onto an outsider was accepted. Although priests were respected as authorities, they were not really considered as made of the same clay as the people, and were perceived as existing outside the community. Moreover, priests conformed to a stereotype in the people's minds: the priest was someone who preached one thing and behaved in another way. The faults of the priests were known in the village. A very common saying, which I collected from Giacobbe was "Do as the priests say, but do not do as the priests do."⁶⁶ Hostility towards the priest was expressed in two local folktales I collected from Olga (see Appendix 2). Set in Frassinoro, one of them concluded with the priest being thrown over the hills of Frassinoro by a strong peasant. Other than that narrative, I did not collect any overtly anti-clerical anecdotes, but I did gather many negative comments about the kind of control exercised by priests.

⁶⁶ "Fate come i preti dicono, ma non fate come i preti fanno."

For these reasons, Iusun could easily project his faults onto the priest, and move them, at least temporarily, away from himself. This story was also congenial to the community, since it fed on and reinforced latent hostility for the priest. Again, the priest was someone 'inbetween', neither a real man, nor a divinity. One was told that a good Catholic should be able to see Jesus' face in the priest; but then one saw him behaving in ways that were highly unlikely for Jesus. This ambiguity was a source both of anxiety and of comedy. The priest in Iusun's story becomes a real fool, because, had he been driven by common sense, he would have put all his efforts into saving his head and not the bottle. A sensible villager would have done no less. Through a skilful narrative construction, Iusun succeeded in presenting himself as the symbol of the villager who acts, in every sense, as the 'sober' counterpart of the priest. He inquires about the priest's life, as a sensible person would have done, while the priest thinks of the bottle. Iusun was indeed an artist in the choice of his storyable events. Because of the fact that the anti-clerical narrative genre was not common in the village, I tend to think that this narrative was initially born out of a personal need for rehabilitation on the part of Iusun, and was then taken up by the villagers, because Iusun had successfully tailored it around general assumptions and hostilities.

Also dealing with the outsider – this time a real outsider, the Tuscan – is narrative 19, the account in which the man who had soiled Iusun's door was reprimanded through wit. In the village, the villager has a most effective language and is able to defeat the outsider by using his dialect as an invincible weapon. Iusun has the last word with the umbrella maker in narrative 19, and he beats him on the level of words, by interrupting him, by not allowing him to speak and continue his sentence, and by not allowing him to provide excuses for himself and defend himself. Just as the ambiguity between men and women was resolved through the word that leaves the antagonist unable to reply, so does Iusun, and through him the whole village, win on the level of speech, thus leaving the outsider in the village dumb and ineffective in his communication skills.

These narratives were particularly appreciated and needed because they also counteracted another important set of narratives in which the villager is portrayed as the victim of the outside. These are narratives such as 12, 13, and 36, where the

villager is at a loss in the outside world. The Frassinorese, who is so witty and gets himself out of trouble within the 'home' environment, can hardly cope outside it. The villager outside the village is portrayed as inadequate in the narratives and often gets into all sorts of trouble, mainly because of an inability to communicate.

Contributing to this sense of inadequacy, when outside the village are the descriptions of what lies beyond the boundaries. Portraying the outside as unfamiliar and inhospitable is achieved by describing it as a place where things are distorted, or do not match village standards, or are called with different names. The outside is 'wrong' when compared to the village, and the villagers act clumsily in it, and do not function well. The outside is big, exaggerated, overwhelming, as Dino describes the studio of the photographer in narrative 5. His gestures are clear. He swings his arms in the air to describe the size of the lights that were pointed on them: "And so the moment came when they told us to go in to the photographic studio. Spotlights you know, here and there, everywhere. I say, 'Here we pay an awful lot!'" The outside subverts expectations and often upsets them.

The photographic studio was not the only disproportionate thing to confront Dino in narrative 5. The women too were very "tall" in the outside, e.g. like the cashier in the photographer studio – who, by the way, also had long blond hair, another way of distancing her from the village standard. This sense of disproportionate scale is very well portrayed and exemplified in narrative 36, which describes some overwhelmingly tall women from the outside and the men of the village being danced around as if they were the size of children, unable even to touch the ground with their feet. This episode strikes me as a verbalisation of a feeling of inferiority experienced outside the village. The villager is knocking against the world around. The women outside the village are out of proportion: "And then they were big! [tall] Yes, but it's true, a big [tall] girl!" Not only are the outsiders bigger, even their women are bigger. Even the women, the weak sex, could overwhelm the Frassinorese, grabbing him by the collar, "And so, she was grabbing him from here [his collar]," and lifting him above the ground, like a toy. And the reason why they ended up dancing with these giants was probably that they had to choose the girls who were left, the only ones who were still sitting down:

And so they go in and there was music. And so they say, "Let's go and grab a girl, right, there were two or three sitting down, ha, ha, ha, and so he says, "I take this one and you take the other one." And so they go and grab these girls to go dancing.

The narrative whole continually reminds one of the possibility that expectations will be subverted, and reinforces the image of the outside as a distorted place, where people's real experience is at odds with their previous expectations; a subversion here symbolised by the two unexpectedly tall women. Expressed in humorous terms, this was the subversion of expectations experienced by the emigrants who went through the shock of working in mines, or of fighting at the Front.

A fascinating feature of some of these stories is the language in which the effect of the outside on the people is described. In them, the villagers are often portrayed as rigid, unable to adapt, to understand – exactly how village fools were described, and through the very same mechanisms. Just as the superiority of the villagers at home was made to coincide with his ability to leave an outsider speechless, so the inadequacy of the Frassinorese outside the village was conveyed by portraying him as rigid, clumsy and unable to react to stimuli from outside. The rigidity is visible in their actions, but it also affects their speech, so that they cannot utter a word to enable them to escape from the situation. They do not try to talk themselves out of trouble. Thus, in narrative 36, the man who is being danced around complains to his friends, but not to the girl. He waits for her to put him down: "He says, 'If I can put my feet on the ground, I will never dance again with her!'" In so doing, he perhaps tries to avoid the derision that his friends might have directed towards him for his situation of inferiority, through a *battuta*. However, in terms of the logic of the situation, it is as if he cannot extricate himself from it in any way. The impression is that he can speak to his friends without being heard by her, as if they were inaudible, or as if they communicated in another language. Although the narrative takes place in a village where their dialect would have been understood, this 'inaudible' communication perhaps symbolises the fact that they felt invisible too, that they were not acknowledged as part of the community hosting the dance.

In the same way, the recruits in narrative 13 are mistaken for beggars, but instead of clarifying the misunderstanding, it is implicit in the narrative that they stay still

and do not complain about receiving the alms. This is what Martino obviously wanted the audience to think, and this is in itself the 'funny' part. They were soldiers who had fought for the lives of those who were giving them alms, but were treated as outcasts. These stories seem to embody a feeling the villager must have experienced many times, to be explored in the next section. It was a feeling of inadequacy, which in the narratives translated itself into a sense of paralysis affecting, first of all, speech. So the recruits too were mute, unable to say that they were not asking for alms and therefore condemned to the dishonour of accepting alms, by the inability to react. It is interesting that Giulio Cesare maintained that, if you "emigrate", you soon learn to "keep your mouth shut", since you never know what other people might make of your words. He had had negative experiences with workers' unions while working as a miner, and had been advised by the elderly never to take sides, never to sign anything, never to speak.

Women too could be struggling with words, and in the next case, with linguistic code.

Most of the relatively few narratives I collected from women were concerned with their experiences outside the village, as these contained material that could usefully be passed on for further discussion among young women. This is the case with narratives 32, 33 and 34. Little anecdotes about life in service were exchanged among girls in the village, but also in the city, when in service. In Florence, under the porches of San Marco, the girls from Frassinoro used to gather on their afternoon off, which was usually on a Sunday. They looked forward to exchanging news about Frassinoro, about letters received from home or from lovers, about their daily experience in the city and about coping with the new world. The narratives that circulated were very contemporary and relevant in those days, of sorts that helped them cope with life there. Stories that treated life encounters with self-irony, communicated new knowledge, and also contained information that could prove useful for another girl in her own working situation. What had made a fool of a girl one day could become a problem for another girl the following day. The word that had caused a problem on a Monday afternoon in Florence to one girl, was likely to cause trouble to one of her fellow-villagers on the following Monday. So the sharing of the story on Sunday was important. These stories were therefore important for

communicating knowledge and experience too. The proof of this is that they continued to be exchanged through generations. Mothers would tell their daughters of funny things that had happened to them and to other women in the family before them.

However, although the self-ironical tone contains the seeds of understanding and coping, these stories still seem to contain the feeling of misery and inadequacy, in which the mistakes made by the girls may be funny but also speak of the misery of their situation; they are symbols of their being young and at a loss, and of their having been catapulted out of their element by necessity. While Anna still seems to use the joke as a means to discussing the past, there is a heavy tone in her narrative. Despite the laughter, she still conveys the sense of anxiety and inadequacy caused by her lack of knowledge. The rhythm is fast and nervous: "I went down, the door closed itself [behind me]; I had the children in the apartment, it was a pandemonium!" And when she remarks, "Well, such [nonsense] things [used to happen]! Yes, and especially back then", she is not just laughing, but also remembering the tragedy behind that comic situation.

Anna exaggerates her inadequacy, to draw attention to the misery of their situation, of how defenceless and completely thrown out of their dimension they were. She vehemently declares herself aware of what the *paletto* is, but she still fails to act on the knowledge she has just claimed. Anna says:

My mistress says, "when it [the door bell] rings, come down and put the *paletto* [not to bolt the door, but actually to prevent the door from closing], you know what it is? I say, "Of course!" I look for the *paletto*, but I could not find it.

It is obvious that the meaning of the word *paletto* could have been understood just by paying attention to the context. The lock was either built into the door or lying near it. A tool from the kitchen could hardly be connected to a door. Whether the statement that Anna went to look for the tool is true or not – "I look for the *paletto*, but I could not find it" – the fact that she makes it suggests that she wants to draw attention to the situation of total cluelessness in which she was. Therefore, Anna's comment can be seen, superficially, as a narrative device to make the story funnier,

while ultimately it is an attempt to emphasise the tragedy of the broader context, by describing herself as the fool she never was – or the fool which the situation made of her.

Another narrative Anna tells, proves that she sees these stories as bitterly tragic, while laughing at them too.

For example, there was an aunt of mine who, she says, her signora used to tell her, eh, my aunt Margherita, eh, “Poor little girl, are you sorry to be away from your mum?”[she says this last sentence with a cold and snobbish voice], “I cani venrealise I’m away”. She wanted to say, ‘I cannot even realise I am away’... “I cani venrealise I’m away.” Ha, ha, ha.

“What does venrealise mean?” “Eh, venrealise”. My mother used to tell me this story, ““I cani venrealise I’m away” At least they ate, ha, ha. Oh well!

The statement “At least they ate”, pronounced before breaking into a laugh, is the sign of Anna’s thought. These people were thrown into this world and their ignorance was the exterior sign of their being at a loss.

Narrative 32, 33, and 34 may be contrasted with narrative 35. Together they provide “a pair of linked messages”. Narrative 35 presents a situation that is the opposite of the one in Anita’s and Maria’s narratives. It portrays a foolish village girl inside the village. In this case, the idiot is the girl who could not speak the dialect and recognise elements of village life, just as Anna and Anita could not do when projected outside the village. This makes the contrast between voluntary detachment and involuntary detachment even clearer, and adds gravity to the wish to leave the village expressed by Maria d’la Sasdella in narrative 11.

Lowe notices, in discussing American jokes about immigrants, that they “operate on two levels, namely the immigrant’s ignorance about English and technology” (Lowe 1986: 445). This is interesting because in Frassinoro this kind of humour was actually produced by the very people about themselves.

It is important to note that, with the exception of narratives 17 (about the priest and the flask), 18 (about the gigantic dog), and 19 (the umbrella maker), the objects of laughter are otherwise only villagers. In Frassinoro, I did not collect humorous

stories in which the humour was directed against other groups or villages, or against one village in particular. I felt it was an interesting lack, as in many villages across Italy, the most common jokes are about the people from the neighbouring areas. Also a village near Frassinoro, Palagano, is famous for a collection of tales, called “Palaganeide”, which gathers all the stories that neighbouring villages had made up about the silly deeds of the people of Palagano. It was when we talked about the stories of the Palaganeide that Giulio Cesare remarked there was a difference between those stories and the production of humorous stories in Frassinoro. He said: “Instead these [the humorous anecdotes of Frassinoro] were things of the village, in which we would tease ourselves”. He wanted to stress that they used self-irony more than directing scorn at people outside their group. Giulio Cesare’s remark was confirmed not just by his wife, who was there, but also by the lack of this type of story. I believe that one reason for this lack might reside in the habit of not expressing one’s opinion, which a lot of men had developed during times of emigration. Another reason might have been that self-humour for the villager was an agent that helped cope with dynamics within their community and was therefore mostly used for internal purposes.

The self-deprecating jokes that the people used to tell in Frassinoro contributed to the picture of the outside as difficult and inhospitable; a place where one loses one’s abilities. The main threat seemed to be that of being unable to use the language effectively, since that is the first symbol of integration. If communication is constrained, then the outside will always be an inhospitable and foreign place. And the portrayal of the outside in these terms was useful for discouraging people from leaving – just as useful as eating Maria’s *bensun* was in narrative 11. It did so by showing a world from which the element of familiarity had been eliminated.

One narrative that might seem an exception is narrative 18, where Iusun vanquishes the outsider at the level of words, although he is outside the village. However, it is important to notice that the narrative is set only as far from home as Piandelagotti, which is a neighbouring village. The point is that in Piandelagotti the people from Frassinoro can carry on speaking their dialect, since it is just the same. Although certain differences in intonations between village dialects used to be so pronounced that even at distances of a few kilometres the local people could tell a

person from Piandelagotti or one from Frassinoro, the words used throughout the locality were the same and communication was always perfectly possible among them. Therefore Iusun was on 'foreign' land (since there was some rivalry between the two villages), but within the familiar code: he could speak the dialect, and thus enjoy verbal readiness. On the other hand, the person from Piandelagotti is still an outsider, someone whom the villager likes to vanquish. This justifies Iusun's behaviour of trying to predominate. The laughter is not caused by what he does to the dog, but by his final remark:

Fernando. The dog leaves running.

Dino. He says, "Hey, go and phone Castelnuov in Garfagnana [a place on the other side of the valley], to see if they have seen your dog pass!"

Fernando. Yes, yes, he says, "Phone immediately and ask if it has arrived!"

Having said that the dialect was necessary for the exposure of the outsider through wit, I can see how the song I collected from Giacobbe, to which I refer as narrative 18a, could be therapeutic but, at the same time, not popular among the villagers, since it did not represent a credible situation. In the song, a "stornellata fiorentina," Giacobbe learned from the Cantastorie, a peasant talks himself out of trouble and really subverts the situation of inferiority in which he finds himself:

You will find that Giotto was a shepherd

G. As if to say, "I am a peasant, but also Giotto was a Peasant."

And on a block of stone he painted a lamb

G. And so he says...

Listen to this idiot, and to what he says,

He isn't as dumb as he looked

How dare you compare yourself [to me], you mountain peasant?

You are not even able to give a drink to a donkey.

G. And so he says...

Sure, I am unable and I cannot learn.

Because the donkey is not my usual company.

I just found my self in its company today by total chance, because I came to this inn.

Host! Come here, take the money.

I leave a seat free and I go away.
For I still have to travel many miles.
Give the donkey a drink,
when he has finished eating his hay!
G. It's a good one this one.

I believe that there is very little probability that a villager could have so readily replied to an insult in the standard Italian necessary for him to be understood by the 'gentleman'. The reason for this, is that, although the people were perfectly able to speak Italian⁶⁷ even back then, in the forties, the readiness of mind and word necessary for expressing wit and witty remarks could not be the same in Italian, since Italian did not carry the sound of remembered voices, expressions and examples of wit with it. As I began to collect in the dialect, a richness came out and a readiness which I had not imagined possible. Although the people are fluent in both the standard language and the dialect, they are much more comfortable and effective in the latter, especially because they can rely on common expressions which have been used for centuries. As Abrahams noted of the Vincentian peasants, they "retain an essentially oral culture in spite of the high degree of literacy in the community" (Abrahams 1970: 292). As Abrahams writes "Indeed, the basic institutions of the peasant family – and friendship – networks are defined as much in terms of speech behaviour as by actions [...] One reason for this focus on talk is the retention of the attitude that control of words and speaking events provides the key to community status and personal power" (Abrahams 1970: 292). If we remind ourselves that we are studying a society which was relying exclusively on oral communication for the passing down of skills and which was hardly ever using communication that was not oral, then we can see even more how the loss of speech can be a symbol of the deepest sense of helplessness.

⁶⁷ Today, the Italian my interviewees speak is a standard Italian which is often full of learned terms. As Sister Costanza noticed: "Up there Italian is well spoken. And do you know why? Because, apart from having been to school, and with some good teachers, we also had the luck that our mothers, before they were mothers, had been to Tuscany, in service. The fact that they had to speak Italian gave them a certain mastery of the language. And they also learned manners, for example, there was a great difference between a girl of a place where they did not use to move – where they worked there also in winter time, where they worked and spun and more, without moving to go to the city – because they were more backward than our girls up there. [...] Because they always lived in the same environment [...] In those days [the fifties] going to Modena was more difficult, there were really, they were really still the farmers of the landowners of the past [she refers to the sharecroppers]."

All the above narratives coexisted and remained together, again constituting voices in a dialogue: this time between a sense of inferiority and inadequacy and a sense of pride in the village and its ways. Stories such as the ones where the villager makes mistakes due to his bad knowledge of the language, or to the impact with a new world, are stories about the villager in general. These are narratives in which the protagonist could have been anyone experiencing something that was a villager's experience. They speak of the villager at a loss due to the impact of a new language and a new culture. In these stories, the protagonists are the villagers. They are no longer important as people with peculiar characteristics. They have become more neutral and carriers of the village values and outlook for villagers everywhere. They are like a lens on the world. Therefore, the community readily identifies with the characters. These narratives contain a high level of self-disparaging humour that I believe is meant to impart a special sort of psychological adaptability to the group, allowing the people to transfer their anxiety about possible failure and inferiority onto a symbolic villager at whom they can laugh, thus laughing at themselves too, but in a non-destructive way.

Among these narratives that, as it were, help build suppleness for the bones of the villager, I include two village narratives which have nothing to do with the outsider, but which I feel work within the village repertoire as a part of this strategy of using self-irony to gain adaptability and versatility. Narrative 8 speaks of the general misery of the village, which is somehow symbolised by the very short nightdress the men used to wear, which left a big part of the body exposed. The story is funny but it also contains a bitter feeling, which allows the villagers to laugh at their misery and poverty. The same bitter laughter about poverty is in narrative 41, in which the mattress of hen feathers which comes apart is the symbol of the poverty of this time. The mattress is the cause of the comedy in the end, but the episode contains a note of tragedy in it. In Lucetta's narrative, I believe, there is, beyond the funny scene, still the misery of the human condition, and the conditions in the village in particular, which is described in her hyperbolic scene of feathers all around, in which she and her husband are suddenly seen as small and comic. That misery is felt by the people who tell her story nowadays, as suggested by how Aldina lingered on the description

of the mattress. Reporting Lucetta's narrative gave Aldina a chance to make a diversion on life in those days, on how poor they were:

A. We did not use to have the woollen mattress, you know, and so on...

No, no, no, they did it with the feather, the hen feather. Not the goose feather, as those ones...The chicken feather, they made these quilts and put them underneath.

It is interesting that Alford linked the presence of self-humour in communities as a sign of their emphasis on solidarity:

As we might expect, humour directed at oneself is found mostly in cultures which de-emphasise competition and aggression. [...] Humour directed at oneself also correlates positively with an overall socialisation emphasis on generosity [...]. This seems to make good sense, as generosity implies a degree of selflessness. Directing humour at oneself, of course, will be inhibited where individuals take themselves very seriously (Alford, F.; Alford, R. 1981: 157).

And indeed these little stories did function as building-blocks of solidarity by focusing the attention on things which were the same for everyone, thus allowing the whole audience to share the burden. These stories, by giving everyone a chance to laugh at a shared situation, allowed humour to ease the anxiety caused by a universal problem, that of one's perception of oneself when suddenly projected into a foreign environment. Additionally, they offered a means of dealing with the way others perceive ourselves. The exercise of self-irony allowed the joints of the community to stay flexible and less breakable in the face of sudden changes and severe disappointments.

If self-directed laughter was such a powerful means of attaining affiliation and solidarity, this was due to a particular quality in the laughter. Laughter was shared among people of the same culture, with the same sets of assumptions, who were in agreement as to what they were laughing about and with what spirit, and who were willing to laugh with, as well as at, each other. It was laughter that reinforced their

shared approach to the ambiguities of life and momentarily resolved their feelings of inadequacy connected with the idea of the outside.

Being an outsider, I could not immediately begin laughing at people who were dear to them. I had to wait to be made aware of the context. And the reason for this is easily understood: we can joke about our relatives, but we do not allow other people to joke about them! If we do, it must be because some kind of alliance has been concluded with that non-member of the family. If A tells a joke about B, in front of C, and if all three of them are from the village, then A and C can share the laughter. Besides, as the people often said, in the case of Frassinoro, B would probably be present and laughing too. The situation just described reminds one of what Freud calls a third-person joke, and here he indicates what is necessary in order to enjoy them:

Some degree of benevolence or a kind of neutrality, an absence of any factor that could provoke feelings opposed to the purpose of the joke, is an indispensable condition if the third person is to collaborate in the completion of the process of making the joke (Freud 1960: 145).

When the villager is derided, he who tells and he who laughs must be villagers too. This bond was established not just to generate “an absence of any factor that could provoke feelings opposed to the purpose of the joke”, as far as the relationship between the teller and the audience was concerned, but also on the level of the relationship between villagers and the material of the joke.

Many of these stories laugh at an individual villager but, his situation being so ordinary, the hearers recognised that it could have been them too. There is a sense in these narratives of sharing a way of life and what that might bring. Indeed, much of the ‘benefit’ of these stories lay in the fact that they portrayed issues affecting everyone. However, although the hearers recognised that they could have been in the same position as the ‘malfunctioning’ villager in the outside world, they could also feel sure that they were laughing at a “slightly strange version of themselves” (Davies 1998:1), thus implying that they would have acted differently in the same situation and that they would not have felt inadequate. They somehow have the

chance to laugh *with* the potential outsiders, thus momentarily and virtually joining the community of the ‘others’ in the mockery directed at the Frassinoresi.

These two elements – of shared destiny on one hand, and of distance from the malfunctioning villager on the other – take us to another dimension of laughter, which we may view as a village extension of what Freud described. When Bergson spoke of an “absence of feelings which usually accompanies laughter” (1911: 4), he went on to say that “To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anaesthesia of the heart” (1911: 5).

When the laughter was directed at the self as villager, this meant that, in order to laugh, the villagers had to consciously de-activate their feelings of self-pity for their misery. In other words they were taking a different viewpoint on their tragedy, detaching themselves from it, and treating it as comedy. This was something that only persons who, as it were, lived the drama had the right to do.

More than a decision to ‘anesthetise the heart’ it was a need for versatility as to viewpoint, readiness to see things from another point of view, which helped the Frassinoresi to cope with their lives. It was a need to see oneself no longer as victim, but as actor and director.

5.11 Turning thoughts and feelings into events.

This section looks into how certain stories might have been constructed. Although we have so far stressed the community element of these stories, it is also important not to forget that the authors were few and that the stories must have formed within their minds before they became narrative material. I believe that some of these personal narratives were actually invented by those who originated them, in order to give body to their thoughts, to turn thoughts into narrated events.

Here is an example. In narrative 13, the two recruits from Frassinoro are mistaken for beggars. I wish to suggest that this narrative could have come about as a way of giving substance to a sensation the teller had, a way of giving body to feelings. In other words, instead of relating our experience in abstract terms, such as “When I went to Modena I felt like a beggar, in comparison with the others”, we can project our thoughts onto what the other might have been feeling about us and make the internal experience of inadequacy into an external event, by saying “When I went to

Modena I was mistaken for a beggar and given alms". The alms are the tangible token that makes the sensation appear real. Narrating the physical giving of alms removes any doubt as to the fact that the Modenesi really thought the two recruits were beggars.

Thus we can construct a fictional event which embodies a physical realisation of our own true feelings in a certain situation. The narrative might not be literally true at all, but the feeling it embodies is, as it has been experienced directly by the teller. In this I see an example of what Bernstein listed as a characteristic of the restricted code, which is that of facilitating "the ready transformation of feeling into action. It is a code where changes in meaning are more likely to be signalled non-verbally than through changes in verbal selections" (Bernstein 1964: 56).

Expressing this feeling by simply trying to describe the feeling itself could have been difficult. It would have meant moving to a certain level of abstraction. By contrast, telling a narrative which contained a typical situation in which that feeling would have been felt enabled the feeling to be communicated successfully using concrete terms. It is also a way of discussing feelings covertly, without making it look like we are so upset by them that we feel the need to vent them. The little 'lie' that the teller of narrative 13 might have told about receiving alms is a way of conveying meaning in concrete terms instead of in abstract terms.

An example of 'concretising feelings into narrative fragments' is found, I believe, in one particular episode Hymes (1996) reports from his own experience. He speaks of people who make up little stories about their lives. He relates having noticed "a bit of experience becoming an event to be told, being told and being retold, until it took shape as a narrative, one that might become a narrative told by others". And as an example he cites the following situation:

My oldest Wasco friend, Hiram Smith, once did this to me. We had looked about for some twenty minutes in a store in The Dalles, drifting out at last. Later, to his daughter, Hiram reported, 'Oh, that guy in there, he didn't know nothing about fishing equipment, Dell and I just turned around and walked right out'. Nonsense partners us (Hymes 1996: 118).

This “bit of experience” was obviously changed by the teller, and in front of the person who shared the experience with him. It seems to me that the way in which Hymes’s Wasco friend retold the story was a way of turning into events a message directed to Hymes, which would have otherwise had to be expressed in an abstract way. The new way of narrating the event is about turning feelings into actions. The narrative is functional for creating and communicating sense. I believe that the deep intent of this ‘distorted’ report of a common experience in front of Hymes himself was that of communicating his feeling of friendship for Hymes, the bond he felt with him. In order to be expressed, this feeling needed a rival against which the two could be seen as allies and friends. The rival was the shopkeeper, and the bond between Hymes and his friend was in how quickly they both walked out, having had the same impression. In other words, this is an event embellished with para-events which contain meaning. They have not happened, but they are narrative transpositions of a thought which occurred during the real event, or which the event allowed to be explored. And they can be narrative transpositions of feelings too, which tell how the person feels about the event.

I see Hiram Smith’s narrative as very similar in its construction to what I am postulating for the recruits in Modena. In both narratives, the initial situation is true – e.g. the recruits are in Modena and they feel out of place – but the second part seems to be constructed in order to explain how the person felt during the situation described in the first part of the narratives. To explain this I go back to Hymes’s explanation of his friend’s narrative:

Many must have had experiences of this kind [such as hearing the story above]. Such experiences seem to point to something a bit beyond our current concerns. There is a current movement to go beyond collection and analysis of texts to observation and analysis of performance. That is essential, but perhaps just the second moment of three. The third is what Hazel Suppah often did, what Hiram Smith did, what members of cultures world-wide often do, I suspect. Continuous with the others, this third is the process in which performance and text live, the inner substance to which performance is the cambium, as it were, and crystallised text the bark. It is the grounding of performance and text in a narrative view of life – that is to say, a view of life as a source of narrative.

Incidents, even apparently slight incidents, have pervasively the potentiality of an interest that is worth retelling. The quality of this is different from gossip, or the flow of people who have nothing but themselves to talk about – their illness, their marriages, their children, their jobs, etc. Not that the difference is in the topics. The difference is in the silences. There is a certain focusing, a certain weighting. A certain potentiality, of shared narrative form, on the one hand, of consequentiality, on the other.

If such a view and practice is the grounding of an essential texture of certain ways of life, then it needs to be experienced and conveyed if others are to appreciate the way of life (Hymes 1996: 118).

There are two main important things about this quotation. One is that it articulates with clarity how important the act of telling is in itself, and it applies to the Frassinorese. Telling for them was an indispensable activity, and it still is today. Even those who were shy and said of themselves they could not tell stories, had great sense of pauses and rhythm when telling the stories of their lives and even the most uninteresting episodes. I often witnessed men being able to talk for a long time about any little piece of experience. The elderly still talk to each other and comment on the world. They sit by the side of the main street, they meet in the bar, they walk to the shoemaker's shop and sit, for a few hours commenting on the world.

However, I feel that the important element in all this is not so much that people feel that life is worth retelling, but how they re-elaborate the experience of life; how much they change, omit, and what they linger on. I have experienced what Hymes speaks of when paying informal visits, without the tape recorder, to Anna's house. On those occasions, I would spend some time on the chair by her front door. People would come by, in and out, saying hello and stopping to tell something. The conversation was all about telling things that had happened, and very ordinary experience was related in the way Hymes describes. At times the conversations simply related bits of experience, such as having been at the grocery shop next door. However, once a second visitor came, Anna would sometimes tell the bit of experience she had been told by the previous visitor. The stories of the supermarket changed. According to who was in the house, Anna told the story of what so and so had bought in different ways, emphasising at times the prices of the food and other

times its nutritional values. Anna seemed to be sending her visitors personalised messages through what was, on the face of it, the same story.

My impression is that the event is told, and often changed, in order to communicate something. The way in which we relate an event, the point of view from which we decide to stand while relating it, reveal precious details about how we feel about the situation, as well as the hearer. So the narrative view of life as I understand it is the ability to narrate life woven with personal meaning, which comes in the form of narrative segments added to the 'real' event, of little added fictional events. The humiliation of receiving alms was the deepest point of misunderstanding, for people who had just come back from the War. The narrative also provided a way for other people to engage with their similar feelings. Because the events in them are simple, such as the visit to Modena of the two recruits, it is very likely that other people would have felt in the same situation of inferiority, feeling like a fish out of water.

When one tells in a community, personal narratives do not just allow the teller to satisfy his need to "be listened to" (Stahl 1989: 38), but also imply that he provides others with means to express themselves and achieve catharsis. The gifted individual could communicate his state of mind and his feelings through stories, and then offer them as a means through which the catharsis could be experienced by all. If a villager told the story of the recruits on a particular occasion, the people would be likely to share some of his intent and state of mind, or to pick up the clues in the present context that had made the teller think of that story. They would therefore 'activate the performance' (Foley 1995: 42) and renew its meaning in the present, or assign it a new one. Whatever they did, they would be reinforcing the bond among them, as they all knew what it felt like.

As it can be observed, this self-mockery has not reached the stage, as in Jewish humour, for example, of applying to the self the stereotypes the others have created, but it is still at the level of projection of the villager's feelings on the outsider. As a result, the Frassinorese in the stories simply cannot function, but his non-functioning is neutral, it is not made of special stereotyped reactions connected with the outsider's idea of the 'mountain peasant'. This device of turning the prejudices of the outsider on themselves came later in time, and it is there today. However, it happens

in serious forms, whereby one often hears people directing at themselves the negative comments – such as being rough and introverted – which the city people have always directed at them.

I believe that narrative 33 also is another particularly clear example of turning thoughts into events. In this case, it is about having a funny idea and having to find a means to communicate it. The reason why I think narrative 33 was made up, at least in good part, is that the misunderstanding on which Anita builds her story could not have occurred in those days. Apparently, in the late thirties, when this event supposedly took place, the rude word (*cazzo*) recalled by the word “cazzeri” was not in use among young women in Frassinoro, and it is likely that the thirteen year-old Anita had not heard it yet. I believe that Anita, in her later years, was struck by the assonance between *capperi* and *cazzeri* and saw in it a good joke, in the light of the modern vocabulary. She probably thought that that was the kind of thing she could have said as a teenager when she was in service and found that amusing. But we cannot laugh at our own jokes, as Freud writes:

If I come across something comic, I myself can laugh heartily at it, though it is true that I am also pleased if I can make someone else laugh by telling it to him. But I myself cannot laugh at a joke that has occurred to me, that I have made, in spite of the unmistakable enjoyment that the joke gives to me. It is possible that my need to communicate the joke to someone else is in some way connected with the laughter produced by it, which is denied to me, but manifest in the other person (Freud 1960: 143).

A joke is in itself a linguistic manifestation, as it exists only in the language. Therefore, it needs to be communicated and ‘tried’ on others in order to be enjoyed. So Anita must have constructed a whole narrative, because the alternative option of just telling a friend the word-play that had occurred to her would not have been funny. She needed a context around it and a context which could be enjoyed by everyone. The last line, in particular, is very well balanced and rehearsed and plays with many associations, such as one often hears in gross jokes about ‘measuring’ virility:

“Well”, I say, “I wanted twenty-five grams of them!” Oh, God, God, God, what a shame!

Indeed the last line could have not occurred to a girl who “ was thirteen years old, leaving the village, where you spoke like this, our own way” ; and it is interesting that Anita skilfully stresses this innocence at the beginning of the narrative, as if to prepare for what comes next. And it is this last line in particular that makes us think of the adult Anita as an imaginative author who could use the present linguistic tools to voice the frustration of the past, and neutralise it through laughter.

It is very likely that the “*piatto piano*” story (narrative 32) is likewise the fruit of a great idea. Anita could not have said to a friend “Imagine if I had carried the *piatto* really slowly when I was in Pisa, because I had misunderstood what it meant. Wouldn’t it have been really funny?” A smile would have been the maximum response she could get, since this is not a joke yet. Instead, she set off to turn her witty reflection on a pun into a narrative.

I argue that Anita might have come to interpret her feelings in service only later in her life, and found then, when she could finally express herself through wit, a way to air those feelings for the first time, by reifying them in a narrative. Not any narrative though, but one that allowed her to express herself and tease herself, while, at the same time, arousing *laughter with* in the community. This shared laughter contributed to maintaining a sense of community solidarity, and finally offered Anita the very acceptance that had been lacking in the foreign situation she describes in the narrative.

Conclusion

To conclude this work I must go back to its title. When I tried to ask the interviewees why they used to tell the narratives in the corpus, I invariably received the same answer: “*Tanto per ridere*,” ‘just for a laugh’. It was only after some time that I began to see this as a most meaningful answer to my question and understood that these stories were primarily instruments for creating moments of group interaction characterised by laughing activity.

This became the underlying thought in the thesis, and subsequently carried with it many other related ones, such as the fact that laughter was not a passive activity, but something we set out to provoke voluntarily, in order to allow the group to experience its benefits. As a result, the leading argument in this work could be summarised as follows: people elicit and grant laughter, and humorous stories are devices used to elicit laughter – on particular subjects – thus promoting different kinds of divisions and alliances – often the result of the opposition to a stigmatised person – and confirming a number of different values and models.

Laughter, considered in its two aspects of *laughing with* and *laughing at* – and their respective affiliating and disaffiliating functions – is a powerful mode of group interaction. The oscillation between affiliation and disaffiliation makes laughter a most flexible tool for dealing with, and adjusting to, changes from the outside, as well as within the community – such as generational ones.

Community laughter can be seen as a “coping behaviour”. I borrow this term from Woods’s definition of school humour, for which I find it useful to substitute ‘humour’ with ‘eliciting group laughter’:

I have argued here that much of [eliciting group laughter] is to be seen as ‘coping’ behaviour, a means of adjusting the self to difficulties and problems that otherwise might result in failure of tasks, alienation of self, or breakdown of social order (Woods 1983: 122).

“Adjusting the self” – both individual and collective – is in itself a dynamic process. Just as dynamic is our corpus, which was used as a primary tool for achieving adjustment. In this concluding stage it is important to see our corpus as a dynamic whole which contains in itself stories symbolising stages and attempts towards adjustment. The dynamism of the corpus is reflected both in the process of creation of its stories (diachronic aspect) and in its internal consistency (synchronic aspect). The stories, designed to be passed around in the community, were the result of a process of many retellings in which every teller could revisit them for his own purposes. Every story is the result of a collective creative effort, in which narrative creativity is used to explore new ways of coping with the surrounding world. For this need to explore, the narrative could not settle into one standard version, and this was what turned it into a most flexible community tool for interaction.

This character of mobility is also evident when considering all the stories in their relation to each other, in the light of the kind of laughter they elicit. The corpus contains stories which target the odd in the community, thus confirming village normality, but at the same time it also includes self-disparaging narratives which target the general villager at odds with the outside. It is a complex alternation of *laughing at* and *laughing with* which implies that, as Sollors states (although for my purpose I will substitute ‘outsider’ with ‘stigmatised person’):

[comic] boundaries can be rapidly created and moved, as communities of laughter arise at the expense of some [stigmatised person] and then reshape, integrate those [stigmatised persons], and pick other targets (Sollors 1986: 132).

Reshaping of “communities of laughter” is a consequence of a change of the point of view adopted. One of the main effects of the increasing twentieth century contact with the outside was not only the threat of changes, but the introduction of a new point of view from which the villagers looked at themselves. In general, the corpus reflects the sense of inadequacy resulting from a common anxiety: “What will others think of me?” At the time in which this corpus was produced, the ‘others’ were not just the villagers and the neighbours, but also the outsiders. As a consequence, the

'normality' which some stories seem to confirm – by supplying butts on which people projected their faults – could also carry a self-deprecating sense, whereby their 'normality' was felt as being at odds with a 'bigger normality', that of the 'other'. Self-mocking was one way people had of fighting the fear of possible criticism from the outside, by directing derision at themselves before the 'others' could. We can therefore see the story-telling as being organised in progressively bigger circles, each one beaming on the other, and in which each larger circle laughs at the smaller one, while being laughed at by a yet bigger one. Each circle elicits laughter from one particular group, the members of which are allied against a different target according to the 'normality' they seek to confirm. Recognising these repeated shifts in points of view within the narratives in the corpus is what allows us to see it as a dynamic whole.

For these reasons, although I maintain that humorous narratives were used to promote self-definition in the face of incipient changes from the outside, it is possible to argue that the stories were not meant to promote a new rigid community model. On the contrary, the negotiation of a modern self seems to lead towards the emergence of a new, more flexible self, able to adapt to times of rapid change. And self-disparagement seems to be an instrument by which to achieve such adaptability.

Adaptability does not necessarily imply subversion, a characteristic usually associated with jokes. Certainly, in the case of the narratives in our corpus, we argued that this characteristic does not seem to apply. However, we also concluded that the difference is not clear cut, if we take the function of laughter into account. To further explain my position here, I will examine Seizer's objections to Douglas's argument that:

The rite imposes order and harmony, while the joke disorganises...The message of a standard rite is that the ordained patterns of social life are inescapable. The message of a joke is that they are escapable. A joke is by nature an anti-rite (quoted in Seizer 1986: 63).

Now Seizer concludes, in the case of her corpus, that jokes are not "innately subversive", and I would agree that this is the case in the community jokes we have analysed. Yet, I would also argue that, if we look at jokes from the perspective of the

type of laughter they elicit, we can say that a joke is indeed 'subverting' in its effect. For it can serve the purpose of suddenly changing the point of view – namely by passing from *laughing with* to *laughing at* – which implies that, during the process, one community of laughter has been suppressed in order to allow the creation of a new one.

Although, as far as our corpus is concerned, I disagree in general with Douglas's position, I believe it is most useful for going beyond the concept of a joke in isolation, and considering it as joined to its result, namely laughter. I do not agree that a joke is generally an "anti-rite"; on the contrary, I argued that it often retraces real experience and that the butt in our stories remains a loser, as he is not a wise fool who can subvert expectations. The jokes in our corpus do not have a carnival character either, and I do not think jokes are in themselves necessarily "disorganising". However, I believe that the laughter they elicit can have a 'subverting' and 'mould-breaking' aspect to it, in the sense that it is designed to prevent people from settling for a fixed model. Community laughter is necessarily mould-breaking in a context where the group perception is that stability conferred by confirming rules is no longer enough and that mobility is needed to cope with changing circumstances. Community laughter is the result of a constant change of point of view and of target at which to direct laughter. I do not think that laughter suggests that "patterns of social life are escapable," but I do believe that it suggests that they are relative and contingent, fruit of changing conventions, and dependent on the point of view from which a group begins to define its concept of 'normality'. Far from being subversive, this 'mould-breaking' action seems to allow people to adapt to situations; it is a kind of community exercise which promotes adaptability and, as a consequence, a higher level of stability.

Looking at our corpus in the wider perspective of the rich range of narratives, rituals and gestural interchanges in the village, we can see it as a transitional point under many aspects. Unlike other kinds of verbal arts, humorous narratives did not carry constraints, either artistic or other. Their performance was not subjected to having a good voice (*Maggi*), or an ability in rhyming (*rime*), or a certain age and position in society (traditional tales), or a didactic function or cautionary function. The humorous narratives did not mean to teach, but to focus on relationships and

interaction. They did not confirm models, but tended towards new ones. More importantly, these narratives extended narrative rights to everyone, thus promoting inclusion and cohesion in times of regular emigration. They were narratives for interaction, unlike many of the other genres of verbal art in the village which often were univocal in their delivery. Contrary to the traditional narratives that had come before them, and had for some time coexisted with them, humorous narratives were not designed purely to confirm village values and morality. Rather, they adopted other perspectives and applied them to the reality of the village, in the attempt to understand the value of past teachings and models in the modern era.

Nowadays, in Frassinoro, people seem to follow an almost opposite approach in the construction of their narratives, whereby they apply their own perspective to the lives of others. People of all ages and genders engage in heated and deeply felt discussions about famous people they refer to by first name. This is by no means a unique thing, and must have been observed before in other settings, but it is interesting to link it with something Giacobbe once said: “When you open that [turn the television set on] it is not Frassinoro you will hear about, but Rome or...” The tendency to apply one’s perspective to ‘foreign’ matters – from complicated issues of international politics, to equally complex scientific discoveries – might be in part influenced by the fact that nowadays people are constantly bombarded with images from all over the world, but that picture of the world never seems to include them in any way. It is therefore necessary to introduce themselves into it by means of comments, of narratives. This is one fundamental difference between contemporary narratives in Frassinoro and the stories in our corpus: they were not affected by the need, imposed by the era of information, to participate in the world by means of criticising abstract issues and situations often very distant from them. As Alba summed it up, in the quote I reported in chapter 4:

Now they talk about football, or about what they saw on television, of all those things...which in the old days did not exist, because here the things [we told] were *all real*, the things that happened [in the village].

In the days when our corpus was fully operational, the people could still concentrate on their own reality and use the outside influences to enable them to turn their own lives into narratives, being the absolute protagonists.

The analysis of our corpus has allowed us to throw light on a few points which might be useful for further research. We have concluded, for example, that it is important to bring laughter, and its dynamics, into the study of humour, and that much of what has been so far applied to humour could actually prove more illuminating if applied to laughter. Humour is principally to be read as a mode of communication, and it is important to bring the designated recipients into account when studying it.

In the course of this work we have been drawing attention to the importance of the audience's reaction to the humorous narratives, thereby suggesting that they cannot be studied in isolation from the effects they elicit on those they are meant for. Although recent studies of personal narratives tend to concentrate in great detail on the ways in which they are performed, most of those which report humorous narratives among their samples discuss them in complete isolation from the reaction they are meant to provoke. By contrast, we have concluded so far that we must look for meaning in the superimposition of the text upon the kind of reaction it elicits from the appointed audience. In other words, if Menga's husband had not laughed at her joke, or had we not been told that he used to, we would have concluded very different things about the meanings and purposes of narrative 6. This principle, of course, applies only to groups with a shared knowledge and where the teller knows the reaction his stories will cause. I believe that the study of humorous narratives would benefit from being taken back into a community perspective, where members of the groups under study are linked by some kind of familiarity and not just drawn together by chance. This community approach could offer an opportunity for many empirical studies on audience's reactions to humorous stories. "Reception" theories have so far overlooked the fact that, before the 'reception' of a message there is a 'reaction' to it. The way in which we understand a statement is invariably influenced by the reactions it causes in us. At the same time, a teller with a knowledge of the reaction to his story will be telling with a view to causing that particular reaction, as a means of achieving specific group dynamics.

We have dealt with the concept of normality, concluding that the stories confirm the contingent nature of this concept, which cannot but be expressed in opposition to others. The reality of the small community or group with shared knowledge can provide valuable insight into the understanding of concepts of normality, even in our global reality. Studies of ethnic humour in global society might find suggestions in this small relational environment. Generalised jokes that circulate nationwide might not be the only means of detecting coping strategies through humour in multiracial communities, and one could argue that something is to be found on the micro level, that of the small groups habitually understood as areas within which people form their perception of their identity. It is in that private sphere that we might find narratives which tend to discuss old models in the light of the incoming ones, and which speak of feeling at odds with emerging alternative ways of being a woman, a man, a mother...

Finally, we have been suggesting that a “self-conscious” approach to the study of community is fundamental. It was by looking at the individual as creator of humorous narratives that we were able to individuate many of the mechanisms in the construction of narratives which then proved to apply also to the wider reality of the community. I believe that, especially because of the attention reserved for the individual, the results of this study can be generalised to suit realities that differ from community ones and provide insight into how people, still today in our modern world, elicit and offer laughter, in order to organise and reorganise themselves into communities, negotiate acceptance and inclusion, create and challenge models, establish alliances, and adjust the self to the demands of society. The observations made in Chapter 5 about possible mechanisms of construction of narratives might lend themselves to suggestions in the area located between psychology and sociology. I say ‘between’ because, although it might contain suggestions about one of the elementary mechanisms of defence, known as ‘projection’ – whereby we project onto others the things we fear and onto reality the things we feel – our corpus is not so much found within the micro-relational reality of the family, which is more the area of psychology, so much as within the reality of macro-relational studies, which pertain more to sociology. However, the border is blurred, because we could argue that the society of Frassinoro can be seen as a family, since the elderly were

often called upon as guides regardless of their family ties with the person in need of advice.

This work could not include – mostly for matters of space – all the many interesting aspects that could derive from the study of the corpus. I will name just a few of the things I could not do and which await further research. I could not include all the stories I have collected, some of which contained instances of the use of humour to fight the fear of death, that it would have been interesting to explore. As to the ones I included in the corpus, I could not analyse all of them. I chose to concentrate on some, but I also chose to leave in the others, as they could add meaning to the discussion by simply being there. Again, it would have been illuminating to provide more versions of the same text, so as to convey the idea of the process of collective imagination which contributed to the dynamism of the corpus. Also, although I had started fieldwork among younger generations, I could not at the end of the day find the space to compare the stories of the corpus with the narratives of today.

As to performance issues, although I introduce the stories in the order in which they were told, I could not focus on the analysis of the sequencing, a matter which does deserve attention, as it could confirm, for example, that there are patterns in the choice of genres that are suitable for opening and closing a gathering. Thus, I was able to observe that family stories opened both group interviews. Then came the legends and the old narratives, and then came the humour. It is interesting to speculate that stories might be introduced following a past-present-future pattern, whereby the genres connected with the past come first, then those of the present, such as humorous anecdotes, and then the ‘prophetic’ ones, such as speculations of the kind “Where will we all end up, if we go on like this?” The group interviews were video recorded, but we could not in this work focus on the gestures, and the meaning that is conveyed through them; I give only a few examples in Appendix 4. Italian people – it is not a stereotype – do rely heavily on gestures, often to replace adjectives. The comic in particular relies on gestures, expressions, pauses, monosyllabic exclamations and much more, all of which would be of great interest for the understanding of laughter. In line with this aspect of performance, since I am not a dialectologist or a linguist, I could not focus on the code switching in the

narratives. Although I tried to convey the flow of the alternation *grossomodo*, by using italics for the dialect in my transcriptions and translations, I could not concentrate on the meaning and implications of it. It is interesting to speculate that funny lines and punch lines, as well as lines that benefit from fixed phrasing, are often kept in dialect, even within a text delivered mostly in standard Italian.

Finally, I mention one particular side of narratives which I could not explore and which I have reserved for future research. It is what I call the “generous side of telling”. It occurs when we put ourselves up as scapegoats to create harmony, not so much by the use of existing parables (see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1975), as by the original creation of personal narratives on the spot, in which we ‘lie’ about our experiences – we construct fictive experience, to create narrative precedents for people’s difficult current situations, which might help them recover hope. These are narratives in which, as Fabio Turrini once suggested, we arrive to the point of denying our own ideals in order to build a bridge towards others.

To conclude, I hope this work has succeeded in confirming that apparently insignificant small narratives, and humorous ones in particular, can reveal invaluable information about how people live their relationship with the world that surrounds them and how they negotiate their identity in the light of the images they project and that others project on them. Priorities and preoccupations change but, when it comes to attempts to articulate feelings and communicate thoughts through humorous narratives, the strategies followed still seem to be very similar across time and cultures, and Frassinoro suddenly ceases to seem small and remote.

Bibliography

Aarne, A.; Thompson, S.

(1961). *The Types of the Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*. FF Communications 184. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Abrahams, R. D.

(1970). "A Performance-Centred Approach to Gossip". *Man* 5, New Series, pp. 290-301.

Alford, F.; Alford, R.

(1981). "A Holo-Cultural Study of Humour". *Ethos* 9, pp. 149-164.

Apte, M. L.

(1985). *Humour and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Austerlitz, R.

(1977). "Towards the Classification of Folklore Genres". *Studia Fennica* 20, pp. 44-47.

Bakhtin, M.

(1981). *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

(1986). *Speech Genres and other Late Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Barth, F.

(ed. 1969). *Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Boundaries: The Social Organisation of Culture Difference*. Bergen-Oslo: Universitets Forlaget.

Bartlett, F. C.

(1920). "Some Experiments on the Reproduction of Folk-Stories". *Folklore* 31, pp. 30-47.

Bascom, W.

(1965). "The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives". *Journal of American Folklore* 78, pp. 3-20.

Basso, K. K. H.

(1988). "'Speaking with Names': Language and Landscape among the Western Apache". *Cultural Anthropology* 3, pp. 99-130.

Bateson, G.

(1972). *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*. Aylesbury: Intertext.

Bauman, R.

(1986). *Story, Performance and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative*. Cambridge:

Cambridge University Press.

(2004). *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Bauman, R; Abrahams, R. D.

(ed. 1981). *"And Other Neighbourly Names": Social Process and Cultural Image in Texas Folklore*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Ben-Amos, D.

(1977). "The Concepts of Genre in Folklore". *Studia Fennica* 20, pp. 30-43.

Benjamin, W.

(ed.1992). *Illuminations*. London: Fontana Press.

Bennett, M.

(1998). *Oatmeal and the Catechism: Scottish Gaelic Settlers in Quebec*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers.

Bergen, R. K.

(2006). "Legends Translated into Behaviour". *Fabula* 47, pp. 255-263.

Bergson, H.

(1908). *Le Rire: essai sur le signification du comique*. Paris: Félix Alcan.

(1911). *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. London: Macmillan

Bernstein, B.

(1964). "Social Class, Speech Systems and Psycho-Therapy". *The British Journal of Sociology* 15, pp. 54-64.

(1971). *Class, Codes and Control: Theoretical Studies Towards a Sociology of Language*, Vol.1. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Boston, R.

(1974). *Anatomy of Laughter*. London: Collins.

Bottigheimer, R.

(1987). *Grimm's Bad Girls & Bold Boys: the Moral & Social Vision of the Tales*. London: Yale University Press.

Braid, D.

(1996). "Personal Narrative and Experiential Meaning". *Journal of American Folklore* 109, pp. 5-30.

(2002). *Scottish Traveller Tales: Lives Shaped through Stories*. University Press of Mississippi.

Bremond, C.

(1973). *Logique du récit*. Paris: Édition du Seuil.

Bremond, C.; Le Goff, J.; Schmitt, J. C.,

(1982). *L'Exemplum*. Typologie des sources de l'Occident medieval, Vol. 40. Turnhout: Brepol.

Bricker, V. R.

(1980). "The Functions of Humour in Zinacantan". *Journal of Anthropological Research* 36, pp. 411-418.

Bruford, A.

(1981). "Memory, Performance and Structure in Traditional Tales", *Arv* 37, pp.103-109.

Bruner, E. M.

(ed. 1984). *Text, Play and Story: The Construction and Reconstruction of Self in Society*. Prospect Heights, ILL: Waveland Press.

Burke, Kenneth

(1941). *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*. [Baton Rouge]. Indiana State University Press.

Burlakoff, N.; Lindahl, C.

(ed. 1980). *Folklore on the Two Continents: Essays in Honor of Linda Dégh*. Bloomington: Trickster Press.

Cantelmo, A.

(1992). *Carolina Invernizio e il Romanzo d'Appendice: L'ininterrotto successo della celebre scrittrice popolare*. Firenze: Universale Atheneum.

Cavazza, S.

(1997). *Piccole Patrie. Feste Popolari tra Ragione e Nazione durante il Fascismo*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Chapman, A. J.; Foot, H.

(ed. 1976). *Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications*. London: Wiley.

(ed. 1977). *It's a Funny Thing Humour*. International Conference on Humour and Laughter, 1976, Cardiff. Oxford: Pergamon.

Chesnutt, M.

(ed. 1993). *Telling Reality: Folklore Studies in Memory of Bengt Holbek*. Copenhagen and Turku: NIF Publications.

Cohen, A. P.

(1994). *Self Consciousness: An Alternative Anthropology of Identity*. London: Routledge.

Cruikshank, J.

(1998). *The Social Life of Stories: Narrative and Knowledge in the Yukon Territory*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Davies, C.

(1998). *Jokes and Their Relation to Society*. Humour Research 4. Berlin and New York: Mouton De Gruyter.

(1982). "Ethnic Jokes, Moral Values and Social Boundaries". *The British Journal of Sociology* 33, pp. 383-403.

De Certeau, M.

(1988). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.

Dégh, L.

(1989). *Folktales and Society: Story-Telling in a Hungarian Peasant Community*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- (ed. 1995). *Hungarian Folktales: The Art of Zsuzsanna Palkò*. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Dégh, L. and Vàzsonyi, A.
 (1971). "Legend and Belief". *Genre* 4, pp. 281-304.
- Douglas, M.
 (1968). "The Social Control of Cognition: Some Factors in Joke Perception". *Man*, New Series, 3, pp. 361-376.
 (ed. 2003). *Natural Symbols*. London and New York: Routledge Classics.
- Dundes, A.
 (1980). *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
 (1971). "A Study of Ethnic Slurs: The Jew and the Polack in the United States". *Journal of American Folklore* 84, pp. 186-203.
- Durand, G.
 (1969). *Les Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*. Paris: Bordas.
- Eastman, M. F.
 (1937). *Enjoyment of Laughter: A Study of Humour*. London.
- Eco, U.
 (2001). *Il Superuomo di Massa. Retorica e Ideologia nel Romanzo Popolare*. Milano: Tascabili Bompiani.
- Eco, U.; Federzoni, M.; Pezzini, I.; Pozzato, M. P.
 (1979). *Carolina Invernizio. Matilde Serao. Liala*. Castoro 145. Firenze: La Nuova Italia.
- Emerson, J. P.
 (1969). "Negotiating the Serious Import of Humour". *Sociometry* 32, pp. 169-181.
- Falassi, A.
 (1980). *Folklore by the Fireside: Text and Context of the Tuscan Veglia*. London: Scholar Press.
- Fine, G. A.
 (1977). "Humour in Situ: the Role of Humour in Small Group Culture" in Chapman, A. J.; Foot, H. (eds.), pp. 315-318.
 (1988). "Dying for a Laugh: Negotiating Risks and Creating Personas in the Humour of Mushroom Collectors". *Western Folklore* 47, pp. 177-194.

Finnegan, R.

(1977). *Oral Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

(1992). *Oral Traditions and the Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices*.
London: Routledge.

Foley, J. M.

(1991). *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic*.
Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

(1995). *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. Bloomington and Indianapolis:
Indiana University Press.

Fontana, S.

(1929). *Il Maggio*. Florence: Olschki.

Foster, G. M.

(1945). "Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good". *The American Anthropologist* 67, pp. 293-315.

Fowler, A.

(1982). *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes*.
Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Frankenberg, R.

(1973). *Communities in Britain: Social Life in Town and Country*. London:
Penguin.

Freud, S.

(1960). *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. London: Routledge and Paul.

Frye, N.

(1966). *Anatomy of Criticism*. New York: Atheneum.

Gatto, G.

(2006). *La Fiaba di Tradizione Popolare*. Milano: LED.

Geertz, C.

(1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Giornali di Classe

(1920-1940). *Giornali e Registri di Classe* (Class Journals and Teachers' Journals).
Courtesy of the "Istituto Comprensivo di Montefiorino".

Girlig, F. K.

(1957). "Joking Relationships in a Scottish Town". *Man* 57, p. 2.

Glassie, H.

(1982). *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Folklore and History of an Ulster Community*. Dublin: The O'Brien Press.

Glenn, P. J.

(2003). *Laughter in Interaction*. Studies in Interactional Sociolinguistics 18. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

Goffman, E.

(1990 [1956]). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London: Penguin Books.

(1990 [1963]). *Stigma*. London: Penguin Books.

(1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on Organisation of Experience*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Goldstein, J. H; McGhee, P. E.

(ed. 1972). *Psychology of Humor: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues*. New York and London: Academic Press.

Goodchilds, J. D.

(1959) "Effects of Being Witty on Position in the Social Structure of a Small Group". *Sociometry* 22, pp. 261-272.

Goody, J. R.

(ed. 1968). *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gramsci, A.

(1971). *Letteratura e Vita Nazionale*. Roma: Einaudi Editore.

(1985). *Selections From Cultural Writings*. (ed. Forgacs, D.; Nowell-Smith, G.). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Gregory, J. C.

(1999). *Nature of Laughter*. General Psychology 10. London: Routledge.

Greimas, A.

(1970). *Du Sens: essais sémiotiques*. Paris: Edition du Seuil.

(1970). *Narrative Semiotics and Cognitive Discourse*. London: Pinter.

Gumperz, J.; Hymes, D.

(ed. 1972). *Directions in Socio-Linguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Hammond, P.

(1964). "Mossy Joking". *Ethnology* 3, pp. 259-267.

Harlow, I.

(1997). "Creating Situations: Practical Jokes and the Revival of the Dead in Irish Traditions". *The Journal of American Folklore* 110, pp. 140-168.

Helm, J.

(ed. 1967). *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*. Proceedings of the 1966 Annual Spring Meeting of the American Ethnological Society. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press.

Helme, E.

(1860). *St. Clair of the Isles, or the Outlaws of Barra*. Halifax: Milner and Sowerby.

Hobday-Kusch, J.; McVittie, J.

(2002). "Just Clowning Around: Classroom Perspectives on Children's Humour". *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue canadienne de l'éducation* 27, pp. 195-210.

Holbek, B.

(1987). *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*. FF Communications No. 239. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Honko, L. T.

(ed. 2000). *Thick Corpus, Organic Variation and Textuality in Oral Tradition*. Studia Fennica Folkloristica 7. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Horowitz, J; Menache, S.

(1994). *L'Humour en chaire*. Genève: Labor et Fides.

Huizinga, J.

(1944). *Homo Ludens*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hymes, D.

(1996). *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Towards an Understanding of Voice*. London: Taylor and Francis.

Invernizio, C.

(1890). *Razza Maledetta*. Firenze: Salani.

(1981). *Fior di Pensiero*. Firenze: Salani.

(1904). *Le Disoneste*. Firenze: Salani.

Jason, H.

(ed.1977). *Patterns in Oral Literature*. Mouton: The Hague.

Kane, T. R; Suls, J; Tedeschi, J. T.

(1977). "Humour as a Tool of Social Interaction", in Chapman, A. J.; Foot, H.

(eds.), pp. 13-17.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, B.

(1975). "A Parable in Context: A Social Interactional Analysis of Storytelling Performance", in Carpenter, C. H.; Fowke, E. (eds. 1985) *Explorations in Canadian Folklore*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart.

Klapp, O. E.

(1954). "Heroes, Villains and Fools, as Agents of Social Control". *American Sociological Review* 19, pp. 56-62.

Labov, W.

(1977). *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Le Goff, J.

(1965). *La Civilisation de l'Occident Médiéval*. Paris: Arthaud.

Lévi-Strauss, C.

(1972). *The Savage Mind*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Lindahl, C.

(2001). "Two Tellings of Merrywise". *Journal of Folklore Research* 38, pp. 39-54.

Littleton, C. S.

(1965). "A Two-Dimensional Scheme for the Classification of Narratives". *Journal of American Folklore* 78, pp. 1-27.

Lomax, A.

(1978 [1968]). *Folk Song Style and Culture*. New Brunswick, N.Y: Transaction Books.

Lowe, J.

(1986). "Theories of Ethnic Humour: How to Enter, Laughing". *American Quarterly* 38, pp. 439-460.

Luomala, K.

(1966). "Numskull Clans and Tales: Their Structure and Functions in Asymmetrical Joking Relationships". *Journal of American Folklore* 79, pp. 157-194.

Lüthi, M.

(1967). "Aspects of the Märchen and the Legend". *Genre* 2, pp. 162-178.

(1981). *The European Folktale: Form and Nature*. Philadelphia: ISHL.

Lyle, E.

(1990). "Winning and Losing in Seasonal Contests". *Cosmos* 6 (*Contests*), pp. 161-171.

MacDonald, D. A.

(1978). "A Visual Memory". *Scottish Studies* 22, pp. 1-26.

McGhee, P. E.; Goldstein J. H.

(ed. 1983). *Handbook of Humor Research*. Vols. 1-2. New York: Springer-Verlag.

McKean, T. A.

(1997). *Hebridean Song-Maker: Iain MacNeacail of the Isle of Skye*. Edinburgh: Polygon.

Malinowski, B.

(1971 [1926]). *Myth in Primitive Psychology*. Westport Connecticut: Negro. University Press.

Marrant, D. E.

(1968). "Some Functions of Narrative in Yorkshire". *Folklore* 79, pp. 202-216.

Martin, N.

(2007). *Marriage, Ritual and Dialogue in Celtic Language Culture*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press.

Martineau, W.H.

(1972). "A Model of the Social Functions of Humour", in Goldstein, J. H; McGhee P. E. (eds.), pp.101- 125.

Masoni, L.

(2002; published in 2005). "The Maggio Drammatico in Frassinoro: Its Meaning and Function". *Cosmos* 18, pp. 223-254.

(2007). "Two Different Approaches to the Retelling of Traditional Tales Among 'Non Storytellers' in a North Italian Village" (Paper Presented at the 14th congress of the ISFNR, Tartu, July 26-31, 2005). *Fabula* 48.

Mathias, E.; Raspa, R.

(1985). *Italian Folktales in America: The Verbal Art of an Immigrant Woman*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Maturana, H. R.

(1998). *The Tree of Knowledge: The Biological Roots of Human Understanding*. London: Shambhala.

Mercier, V.

(1991 [1962]). *The Irish Comic Tradition*. London: Souvenir Press.

Messenger, J. C.

(1978). "'The Irish Comic Tradition' of Inis Beag". *Folklore Institute Journal* 15, pp. 235-251.

Morreal, J.

(1983). *Taking Laughter Seriously*. Albany: State University of New York.

(ed. 1987). *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour*. New York: State University Press.

(1999). *Comedy, Tragedy and Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Narváez, P.

(ed. 2003). *Of Corpse: Death and Humour in Folklore and Popular Culture*. Logan: Utah State University Press.

Niles, J. D.

(1999). *Homo Narrans*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Norrick, N. R.

(1993). *Conversational Joking: Humour in Everyday Talk*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- (2005). "The construction of multiple identities in stories by older narrators".
 Unpublished paper presented at: the 9th International Pragmatics Conference. Riva del Garda (Italy) 10-15 July 2005. [Courtesy of the author].
- (2000). *Conversational Narrative: Storytelling in Everyday Talk*.
 Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Ochs, E.; Capps, L.
 (2001). *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. Harvard:
 Harvard University Press.
- (1996). "Narrating the Self". *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25, pp. 19-43.
- Ó Madagáin, B.
 (1985). "Functions of Irish Song in the Nineteenth Century". *Béaloides*,
 pp. 130-216.
- Oring, E.
 (ed. 1986). *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*. Logan, Utah: Utah
 State University Press.
- (1987). "Jokes and the Discourse on Disaster". *Journal of American Folklore* 100,
 pp. 276-286
- (ed. 1989). *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: A Reader*. Logan, Utah: Utah State
 University Press.
- Pavese, C.
 (trans. 2001). *The Moon and the Bonfire*. London: Peter Owen.
- (1967 [1950]). *La Luna e i Falò*. Torino: Einaudi.
- Passerini, L.
 (1987). *Fascism in Popular Memory: The Cultural Experience of the Turin
 Working Class*. Translated by Robert Lumley and Jude Bloomfield. Cambridge:
 Cambridge University Press.
- (1992). (special editor). *Memory and Totalitarianism*. International Yearbook of
 Oral History and Life Stories. Vol. 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Pentikäinen, J.
 (1977). "Repertoire Analysis". *Studia Fennica* 20, pp. 262-277.
- (1978). *Oral Repertoire and World View*. FF Communications no. 219. Helsinki:
 Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Piacentini, M.

(1998). *Il Dialecto di Frassinoro*. Modena: Printed by Tipolitografia Notizie for the author.

(2000). "Tradizione e innovazione". Paper presented at the conference: "La Tradizione del Maggio. La gente, la passione, l'orgoglio," organized by the *Centro Studi e Documentazione sul Maggio drammatico* of Villa Minozzo. [Courtesy of the author].

Powell, C.

(1977). "Humour as a Form of Social Control: A Deviance Approach", in Chapman, A. J.; Foot, H. (eds.), pp. 53-55.

Provine, R.

(2000). *Laughter: A Scientific Investigation*. London: Faber.

Radcliff-Brown, A. R.

(1940). "On Joking Relationships". *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 13, pp. 195-210.

(1949). "A Further Note on Joking Relationships". *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 19, pp. 133-140.

Röhrich, L.

(1991). *Folktales and Reality*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Rotunda, D. P.

(1942). *Motif-Index of the Italian Novella*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Salgari, E.

(1976 [1895]). *Il Re della Montagna*. Milano: Mursia Editore.

Sapir, J. D.; Crocker, J. D.

(ed. 1977). *The Social Use of Metaphor: Essays on the Anthropology of Rhetoric*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Seizer, S.

(1997). "Jokes, Gender and Discursive Distance on the Tamil Popular Stage". *American Ethnologist* 24, pp.62-90.

Sharman, A.

(1969). " "Joking" in Padhola: Categorical Relationships, Choice and Social Control", *Man*, New Series, 4, pp. 103-117.

Shaw, J.

(forthcoming). "Oral Literature and Performance Culture", in *Scottish Life and Culture: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology* 10 (ed. Beech, J. Hand, O.; MacDonald, F.; Mulhern, M. A.; Weston, J.). Edinburgh: Birlinn.

Shuman, A.

(1986). *Storytelling Rights: The Uses of Oral and Written Texts by Urban Adolescents*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Siikala, A.-L.

(1980). "Personality and Repertoire of a Storyteller: An Attempt at Experimental Fieldwork", *Arv* 36, pp.165-173

Simonsen, M.

(1993). "Folktales and Reality", in Chesnutt, M. (ed.), pp. 121-141.

Sokolova, V.K.

(1977). "The Interaction of the Historical Legend with Other Folkloristic Genres". *Studia Fennica* 20, pp. 58-66.

Sollors, W.

(1986). *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stahl, S. D.

(1977). "The Oral Personal Narrative in its Generic Context". *Fabula* 8, pp. 18-39.

(1989). *Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Stephenson, R. M.

(1951). "Conflict and Control Function of Humour". *The American Journal of Sociology* 56, pp. 569-574.

Sykes, A. J. M.

(1966). "Joking Relationships in an Industrial Setting". *American Anthropologist*, New Series, 68, pp. 188-193.

Tannen, D.

(1989). *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue, and Imagery in Conversational Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taussing, M.

(1993). *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of Senses*. London: Routledge.

Teski, M. C.; Climo, J. J.

(ed. 1995). *The Labyrinth of Memory: Ethnographic Journeys*. Westport: Bergin and Garvey.

Thompson, S.

(1946). *The Folktale*. New York: The Dryden Press.

(1957). *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*. Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger.

Toschi, P.

(1976). *Le origini del teatro italiano*. Torino: Boringhieri.

Turner, V.

(1980). "Social Dramas and Stories about Them". *Critical Enquiry* 7, pp. 146-147.

Uther, H. J.

(2004). *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*.

FF Communications 284. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.

Vellay-Vallantin, C.

(1992). *L'Histoire des contes*. Paris: Fayard Presse.

Veronese, A.

(1986). *Dame, droga e Galline: romanzo popolare e romanzo di consumo tra ottocento e novecento*. Milano: Unicopli.

Wallace, W. J.

(1953). "The Role of Humour in the Hapa Indian Tribe". *The Journal of American Folklore* 66, pp. 135-141.

Woods, P.

(1983). "Coping at School through Humour". *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 4, pp. 111-124.

Wylie, L.

(1974). *Village in the Vaucluse*. (3rd edn.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Audio Recordings

Tapes

- 2002.1 (28/12/2002). Anna, Mario and Claudia Bernardi
2003.1 (16/07/2003). Giacobbe Biondini; Maria; Maria Cervetti.
2003.2 (11/2003). Giacobbe Biondini; Ottavia Marcolini.
2003.3 (11/2003). Giacobbe Biondini.
2003.4 (18/11/2003). Giacobbe and Maria Biondini.
2003.4.a (18/11/2003). Dino and Aldina Tazioli.
2004.1 (31/3/2004). Giacobbe Biondini.
2004.2 (26/3/2004). Mario Bernardi; Giacobbe Biondini.
2004.3 (04/2004). Ottavia Marcolini; Giacobbe Biondini.
2004.4 (08/2004). Mario and Anna Bernardi, Giacobbe Biondini.
2005.1 (15-16/09/2005). Ottavia Marcolini, Giuseppe and Laura Marcolini; Adriana and Domenica Pierazzi.
2005.2 (14-23/09/2005). Sister Costanza; Mario and Anna Bernardi; Ottavia Marcolini.
2005.3 (18/9/2005). Sister Costanza.
2005.4 (22/12/2005). Anna Bernardi.
2006.1 (8/1/2006). Dino and Aldina Tazioli.
2006.1a (8/1/2006). Fernando and Onelia Fratti.
2006.2 (14/6/2006). Martino, Alba and Daniela Ferrari
2006.3 (14/6/2006). Dino and Aldina Tazioli.
2006.4 (18/6/2006). Ottavia, Emma and Germana Marcolini.
2006.5 (18/6/2006). Fabio Turrini.
2006.5a. (18/6/2003). Fabio Turrini; Maria Biondini
2006.6 (18/6/2006). Dino and Aldina Tazioli; (22/6/2006). Maria Biondini.
2006.7 (26/6/2006). Giulio Cesare and Maristella Piacentini, Martino and Alba Ferrari.
2006.8 (26/6/2006). Martino and Alba Ferrari; Anna and Mario Bernardi
2006.9 (26/6/2006). Olga Giannasi.

Phone interviews.

- 2006.10 (19.7.2006). Giulio Cesare Piacentini.
2006.10 (23.7. 2006). Aldina Tazioli.
2006.11 (26.7.2006). Olga Giannasi.
2006.12 (22.9.2006). Alba Ferrari.
2006.13 (22.9.2006). Fernando and Onelia Fratti.

Video Recordings

- 2003.1 (17/5/2003). Mario Bernardi; Maria Cervetti.
- 2003.2 (17/5/2003). Mario Bernardi.
- 2003.3 (16/7/2003). Pasquina, Maria Cervetti.
- 2003.4 (16/7/2003). Giacobbe Biondini.
- 2003.5 (23/11/2003). Mario and Anna Bernardi, Adele di Cleto, Maria Cervetti.
- 2003.6 (22/11/2003). Corrado and Tina, Giacobbe and Maria Biondini.
- 2003.6.a (23/11/2003). Anna Bernardi.
- 2003.7 (11/2003). Ottavia Marcolini.
- 2003.8 (20/11/2003). Ariosto and Anita Pierazzi; First group interview part 1: Giacobbe, Maria, Tullio, Wanda, Dino, Aldina, Anna, Mario, Ottavia, Fernando, Onelia, Marco Piacentini.
- 2003.8.a. (20/11/2003). First group interview part 2. Giacobbe, Maria, Tullio, Wanda, Dino, Aldina, Anna, Mario, Ottavia, Fernando, Onelia, Marco Piacentini.
- 2004.1 (26/3/2004). Giacobbe Biondini.
- 2004.2 (25/3/2004). Anna and Mario Bernardi.
- 2004.3 (26/3/2004). Giacobbe Biondini.
- 2004.4 (31/03/2004). Elena di Piandelagotti
- 2004.5 (09/2004). Mario and Anna Bernardi.
- 2004.6 (12/2004). Maria Biondini.
- 2005.1 (01/2005). Fernando, Dino, Aldina, Maria, Oliviero.
- 2005.1a (01/2005). Fernando, Dino, Aldina, Maria, Oliviero
- 2005.2 (05/2005). Maria Biondini.
- 2005.3 (16/09/2005). Adriana Pierazzi.
- 2005.3.a. (22/9/2005). Adriana and Domenica Pierazzi.
- 2005.4 (18-23/9/2005). Sister Costanza.
- 2005.5 (23/9/2005). Sister Costanza.
- 2005.6 (24/9/2005). Second group interview part 1. Anna, Mario, Dino, Aldina, Fernando, Onelia, Martino, Alba, Maria.
- 2005.7 (24/9/2005). Second group interview part 2. Anna, Mario, Dino, Aldina, Fernando, Onelia, Martino, Alba, Maria.
- 2006.0.a (14/4/2006). Preparing for the *Via Crucis Vivente*. Maristella Piacentini, Maurizio Ferrari, FabioTurrini.
- 2006.0.b. (14/4/2006). *Via Crucis Vivente*.
- 2006.1 (19/6/2006). Anna and Mario Bernardi.

Appendix 1

Definitions of Genres

This brief glossary aims to provide definitions of a few genres of verbal arts which were common in the village, and which are often mentioned in the course of this thesis. Most other genres, in particular those more relevant to the discussion of humour, have been defined in the course of the chapters. Here I provide full definitions of those terms which have only been briefly mentioned in the chapters. Although some of these words have standard definitions in standard Italian, it is important to report them here with the sense the Frassinorese gave to them, since it is often different from the standard dictionary definition. Part of my fieldwork consisted in discovering genres and their names and in reconsidering my own definition of common words which in my mind referred to kinds of narratives that differed from those the Frassinorese associated with such words.

Evviva. Lit. 'Hurray.' Propitiatory rhymes recited at weddings. Someone among the guests would take the word and make a witty remark in verse to which another guest would immediately reply. This exchange could last for a long time. At each *evviva*, the guest had to bang on his glass to attract attention and to establish silence. At times extemporised, and other times previously prepared, the *evviva* were most cherished at weddings, so much so that those with a gift for composing them were always invited to every wedding.

Fola (e). The *folia* in Frassinoro is a fictional narrative. (= folktale) With the word *folia*, the people refer both to the short traditional folktales which were told by mothers and grandmothers in the evening, and to the long narratives the Patriarca adapted from the *Arabian Nights*. Rarely used, in this sense, are the words *favola* (lit. fable) and *fiaba* (tale containing magic). Just as the English word 'fable', the Italian term *favola* should refer to tales where no magic objects or people are found. Though it features talking animals and animated objects, they stand as personifications of human characteristics, as allegories and not as magic beings. In reality, nowadays

Italian people often use *favola* and *fiaba* interchangeably. During the interviews, Giacobbe sometimes used *favola*. From the 1920 diaries of the village teacher, I could gather that she referred to the short fictional narratives she used to tell in class, in standard Italian, as *favole*. (= lie) *Fola* is also sometimes used in the village to indicate a 'long boring story' or a 'lie,' and these are the only meanings with which it is still used in standard Italian. *Conta fole* or *conta storie* is still currently used to refer to someone who tells lies. Note, however, that this does not mean that all lies were *fole*. In the course of this work, I use *folia* mostly in the sense of folktale.

Foglio (i). Lit. 'broadsheets'. They contained the stories sung by the *cantastorie*, who was a travelling man who used to go around the remote areas of the region during fairs and religious festivals, singing ballads inspired by a mix of crime news (e.g. a woman cut into pieces and crammed into a box and later identified because of a ring placed on a finger that came out of the box) and love stories. The *cantastorie* would then sell the *fogli*, on which his rhymes were printed. I collected some of these ballads from Giacobbe – who could also sing the tunes as well, because he had memorised them on the spot – and from Maria Cervetti, who, instead, could just recite them – for she had learnt the verses from the broadsheet someone else used to read out to her.

Maggio (i). Lit. 'May'. This term denotes the beloved village folk-play. The *Maggio* is a form of popular theatre in verse, expressed in long series of quatrains of eight-syllable verses rhyming according to an ABBA scheme (*rima baciata*) which are sung as a slow chant, without background music. The language of the *Maggio* was exclusively the standard Italian. The stories it presents are mostly inspired by tales of chivalry, lives of saints, episodes from the Old Testament and nineteenth-century popular literature, such as French serialised novels (*feuilletons*) and gothic novels. This may sound as if the *Maggio* was a literary form of theatre, but, on the contrary, with only a few exceptions, the authors of the scripts were people from those villages in the Tosco-Emilian Apennine mountains, to which the performance tradition was limited – very often people with little education. The *Maggio* was produced and performed for the enjoyment of the people of the community. It was set up by small groups of people, *compagnia* (lit. 'company'), who would perform it for their own

village and often for the neighbouring ones as well.⁶⁸

Partita (e). (lit. ‘match’). See pp.121-122.

Paura (e). (lit. ‘fear’). This is how the Frassinoresi refer to frightening traditional narratives, with a supernatural element in them. According to the occasion, the *paure* could be told as cautionary tales, to keep children and adults away from potentially dangerous places, or as tall tales used to create sensation. One of the main subjects in them is the encounter with the devil, together with mysterious encounters in places where “one could hear [things]” or “one could see [things]” (in dialect “*a s ghe ved*”, “*a s ghe sent*”). At times *paure* are directly referred to as “stories of places where *a s ghe ved* and *a s ghe sent*.”

Stornello (i). The *stornello* is a rhyme which used to be sung out loud, often in the open air, while working. In a field as well as in the public square, young men would communicate and compete with friends, by making up and singing lines to which the friend had to reply. One person started by making up a quatrain. Then the other followed, by repeating the last two lines and attaching two others in alternate rhyme. The *stornello*, which was the Italian equivalent of the English sonnet, originally consisted of one fact of nature and one metaphorical allusion based upon it. Originally, the *stornello* consisted of two lines, on one rhyme. But in Tuscany and in Frassinoro, it was always sung in four lines, on two rhymes. The *stornello* was traditional to Tuscany, and it did not spread in Emilia Romagna: Frassinoro is a rare example of its presence in the region. The *stornello* could also be called *rispetto*, lit. ‘respect’, when it was just recited and not sung. In this version, it was often used by young girls too, as a pastime while being in the fields, looking after the cows. It was also used, at times, as an alternative way of communicating feelings, especially hurt feelings. However, in this case, it was used only by the men, and the women were not supposed to answer back with the same means, as far as I could gather from my informants. Here is an example of a *rispetto* Giacobbe once sang for me, and which he had written after having his heart broken by a girl:

⁶⁸ This definition is taken, with a few modifications, from an article about the *Maggio*, which I wrote in 2004. See Masoni 2004.

G. I have got one [*rispetto*] in mind.

If you knew how much I care for you [a]

You would never even walk past my house. [b]

When you pass, I hope you break your neck. [a]

Save your company, though, if you have some. [b]

[i.e. But I do not wish the same destiny to your new
boyfriend, if you have one.]

[Se tu sapessi il bene che ti voglio

Da casa mia non passeresti mai.

Quando passi troncati il collo.

Salvo la compagnia se tu ce l'hai.]

Appendix 2

Four Examples of Folktales Collected in Frassinoro in the original transcriptions and in English translation: Prezzemolina; L'Indovinello (The Riddle); La Gaggia Magica (The Magic Crow) and Mezzetone.

Notes on the dialect.

In giving the dialect I use a simplified version of the transcription system elaborated by Marco Piacentini (1998). Below I give a sample of a comparison between Piacentini's system (below left), applied to one of the stories I collected (the transcription of which I checked with him personally) and my simplified system (below right).

Al dis, "Ma 'sa
vö-t savèr
d'indvinê!"
Al dis, "Tè n sã
ñént!" "Mì a g
vagg!"

....
"A n gh ẹ lašš
mia andar, la dis,
përchè s'ẹ va là i
l'amaznë," al dis,
"L ẹ meĩ ch'ẹ
faccia murir mì"

.....
Al dis, "Tö mò
alora, a t dagg un
bèl fagutin", al
dis, "che acši a t
dagg drê da
manghiar, che tu
mangerai quando
sei un po' giù in
fuori."
Al dis, "Va ben
mamma, a
partišš."

Al dis "Ma sa vo-
t saver
d'indvine!" Al
dis, "Te n sa
gnent!" "Mi a g
vagg!"

....
"A n gh e las mia
andar, la dis,
perché s'e va là i
l'amazn(e)," al
dis, " L'è mei(i)
ch'e faccia murir
mì."

....
Al dis, "To mò
alora, a t dagg un
bel fagutin," al
dis, "che acsì a t
dagg dre da
manghiar, che tu
mangerai quando
sei un po' giù in
fuori." A dis, "Va
ben mamma, a
partiss"

To keep the transcription as simple as possible, I decided to transcribe using generally unaccented vowels and consonants, apart from the vowels at the end of the word. Also, sometimes *u* is given *ü* (German umlaut), and *o* is given *ö* (similar to the French *oeuf*), because their pronunciation could not otherwise be worked out according to their place within the word, since they are the consequence of the fact that the Italian *u* and *ou* become respectively *ü* and *ö* in the dialect of Frassinoro, and *ö* occurs in irregular verbal forms. The following notes may be helpful for reading the dialect:

- *e* reads *ë* (similar to French *oeuf*, but slightly more open), when followed by a double consonant or by a nasal: *trëccia* (plate), *stëss* (same), *invëntarò* (I will invent), *Të n* (You don't). As can be seen, the pronoun 'te' becomes *të*, when followed by the negative particle 'n'.

- *cc* at the end of a word is pronounced like the English *ch*, but it is almost double in intensity and is similar to what we hear in *got'ya*

- *ghi*, *gghi*, *chi*, *cchi*, as in *sgagghie* (hurry up), *manghiar* (to eat), *curnacchia* (crow), *occhi* (eye) are prepalatal and become *gh*, *ggh*, *ch*, *cch*.

- *s* followed by *m*, *n*, *d*, *b* is pronounced *z* as in 'zebra'.

- *s* followed by *t*, *p*, *c*, is pronounced as the English 'sh':

- *ss* is pronounced like English 'sh', at the end of verbs, or when it occurs in a plural ending.

However, the sounds vary quite a lot according to interviews and speakers. Giacobbe often sounded more from the lowlands and so did Olga. The dialect is changing and evolving. It is also for this reason that a simplified way of transcribing the dialect seemed more helpful for conveying its many sounds without forcing it into old standards.

The Folktales

In this appendix I will provide four examples of folktales. The first two are examples of stories used to convey model of behaviour of men and women. The third and the fourth are examples of humorous traditional narratives, one of which “The Magic Crow”, used to be told as personal narrative.

Prezzemolina

Teller: A.

March 2004

Che c’era questa..., c’era questa mamma, povera, insomma *l’era* povera. C’aveva questa bimba che la mandava a scuola. Prima dietro alle mucche, poi dopo a scuola. Sicché, quando andava a scuola le diceva: “Quando ritorni indietro, devi passare nell’orto della maga a prendere il prezzemolo.”

Allora va bene. La bimba andava a scuola, quando tornava a casa passava nell’orto della maga a prendere un po’ di prezzemolo. Allora..., e va beh. Fallo una volta, due, tre. La terza volta la maga...và dalla mamma e le dice, “Senti,” dice, “io son stanca che tua figlia mi venga a rubare il prezzemolo. E te me lo devi pagare.”

A dis, “Come faccio a pagartelo, non ce l’ho, non c’ho soldi!”

“Allora come facciamo?”

A dis, “Te la tieni!”

Ti tieni la figlia, la bimba.

Sicché questa bimba ancora va a scuola, la terza volta passa nell’orto e prende il prezzemolo.

Dice, “Cosa t’ha detto la mamma?”

“Eh, ha detto di...”

No, m’ha fatto sbagliar tutto.

Sì, la maga va dalla mamma, li dice, “Guarda, non voglio più che mi porti via il prezzemolo”.

Allora la bimba va dalla mamma, glielo dice alla mamma e dice, “Allora, m’ha sgridato anche a me la maga.”

A dis, “Ma sì, digli che se la tenga!”

La mamma, alla bimba.

Sicché quando ritorna la terza volta, *la pasa d’in l’ort* e va a prendere il prezzemolo.

Dice, “Allora la mamma cosa ti ha detto?”

A dis, “Eh, m’ha detto di tenerla”.

Ah, *a descuv in dialett adesa a descov in italian*, ma veh!

“*La m’ha dit che v’ la tgnid.*”

Parlo in dialetto, vai.

E allora la dis, “E va bene, allora devi venir qui.” *E a discov in italian!*

[Ridiamo]

L: Un misto va bene.

A: Ah sì?

L: Sì, come le viene naturale.

A: *Al dis*, “*Alora bisegna c a t venn chi.*”

Allora sta pupina puvrina si mise a piangere...

“Non c’è niente da piangere,” dice, “Ora domattina invece d’andare a scuola, devi andare dall’altra maga che sta in fondo al paese.”

Questa bimba sapeva che quest’altra maga era più pericolosa della prima, di lei.

La dis, “Ma io non ci voglio andare.”

A dis, “Ci devi andare. E devi andare là e gli devi dire ‘M’ha mandato la maga a prendere la scatolina, una scatolina.’”

Sta bimba la partì, *tutta n slenzia*, quand’arriva *ün pezz in là* incontra *ün bell giuvnott.*

“Cosa c’hai bella bimba da piangere?”

La dis, “Eh, la maga mi ha mandato così, e così...,” *al dis*, “e debbo andare a prendere la scatola. Ho paura che... di non arrivare perché poi questa mi mangia.”

Dis, “Non aver paura. Quando sei, quando sei a metà, c’è una porta, devi aprire una porta. E questa porta ha bisogno di essere unta, no? *La ciga*.” A *dis*, “Quest’è la boccettina dell’olio e gli dai quest’olio e ti fa passare. Così si unge per bene.”

Allora va là dalla maga, *la töl la* scatolina e la riporta a questa... e gli diceva lui, “Mi raccomando non aprirla!” “No, no.” *La porta la scatulina*, lì. Dice, “Domattina...,” era andata bene, non le aveva fatto niente perché la porta l’aveva lasciata passare perché con l’ordine della maga doveva ammazzare chi passava, no? Dalla porta *c la cigava l’ava da mazar quell lì*. [...] Sicché la passa, torna a casa, piange. “Ecco, questa è la scatolina.”

La dis, “Domattina devi andare a prendere quell’altra.”

Allora, *la dis*, “Va bene.”

Alora la p(a)rtiss sta guertzeta, la piangiva.

Quand l’ariva a metà strada, incontr ancora ste bel ragazz. Al *dis*, “Ma cosa c’hai da piangere?”

“Eh,” *la dis*, “mi ha detto che devo andare a prendere la seconda scatolina, *ma mi* ho paura, perché c’è il cane e ho paura.”

Alora e ghe deg un pez ed... una pagnotta di pane e *dis*, “Quando passi di lì, la porta l’hai già unta, il pane te lo do. Il cane si abbutta per mangiarti, te gli dai il pane e ti fa passare tranquilla.”

Alora le la partiss e la va. E la va da sta maga, la g da st’atra scatulina, la s turn’indre, la ghe port cog.

Poi c’è d’andare a prender la terza. Allora *la dis*, “Domattina vai a prender la terza e l’ultima, poi non ce n’è più.”

E sta pupina tuta spenta piange. *La dis*, “No, ma *l è inutil che t piangi perché mi.....l’ultima.*”

Sicché parte questa bimba, quando sempre che fu poi un pochino avanti incontrò questo giovanotto.

Al *dis*, “Ma perché piangi?”

La dis, “Eh, sai mi ha rimandato a prendere l’altra scatolina,” *la dis*, “ma io ho paura.”

A *dis*, “Guarda, te quando passi, la porta l’hai già sistemata, il cane l’hai sistemato, ora ci sono delle persone lì che puliscono il forno *cun al trecc ed cavi*. Te gli dai

questa gonna,” questo straccio, una gonna rotta,” dice, “poi ti fanno passare. E poi prendi la scatolina che è l’ultima, ma mi raccomando non aprirla, perché, se te la apri, ti scappano...ci son dentro i ballatori.” *I baladur e i sunadur al giva*, no? “Ma mi raccomando non l’aprire!”

“No, no.” *La va là. La passa tutt e st’üss, po’ la passa l cane, e po’ a ste dunn la g’ da la stanela da pulir e furn e la va a tör la cosa.* Nel ritornare indietro, *i ragazin i en curios, avriss la scatulina la ghe scapa i sunadur. Allora la s miss a pianger.* E ancora c’era questo bel ragazzo, “Eh, ma cosa ch’hai da piangere?” “Eh, ma guarda c’ho voluto guardare dentro, poi mi son scappati *i baladur e i sunadur*, come faccio?”

Al dis, “Sta tranquilla.” C’aveva una bacchettina magica, picchia la bacchetta, *s’ardiüss i balador e i sunador, i tornen in t la scatola. E la rporta alla maga.*

Dis, “Però ricordati che la maga ti dirà che domattina canta il gallo. Te gli devi dire che gallo canta e te gli dici quello rosso, perché è il più cattivo, è quello velenoso che, se lo mangia, *la mor. A gh’è pog da far.*”

Ecco bell’e finita.

Alora, la va a ca’, la g porta sta scatula. La maga la giva po’, “Come mai,” *la dis*, “*te g a t’ fa...*?” Insomma, puo’ portare queste cose qui? Non è possibile, no?

Alora dis, incomincia a dire:

“Porta, uscio! *Perché n te l’ha mazada?*” “*Eh perché ti te m fe cigar e le la m’ha ünt!*”

Poi, “*Can*, perché non l’hai mangiata?” “Perché te mi facevi morire dalla fame e lei mi ha dato il pane.”

“*Oh dunn, perché a n’ la mete i denti e furn?*” “*Perché ti t s è fe spazar e furn cui trec ed cavi e le la s a da un strazz.*”

E allora dopo dice, “Va bene, questa è andata bene, però domattina alle cinque, quando canta il gallo, mi devi dire che gallo è.”

Quello giovanotto era il principe e lei gli disse, la mattina *canta e gall...*

“Qual è il gallo che ha cantato?”

“E’ quello rosso.”

La va là. La chiappò e gal, la g a l fe mazar, e l manghiò e po' dopo, naturalmente, la cosa la murì. La strega la murì. E dopo si presenta questo giovanotto e dice, "Guarda, io sono il principe, però ti ho salvato e tu mi devi sposare."
Allora i fenn un nozz e un strabgozz, mìa m in vgnì via, s'i nn en mort i gh'en tavia.

Prezzemolina

There was this mother, *she was* poor, poor anyway. She had this daughter and she would send her to school. She would send her after the cows first and then to school. So, when she went to school she would tell her, "On your way back, you must stop by the sorceress's vegetable garden and pick up some parsley".

And so all was well, the girl would go to school and, on her way back home, stop by the sorceress's garden and get some parsley. Anyway. Do it once and do it twice... The third time, the sorceress goes to see the mother and says, "I am fed up with your daughter stealing my parsley. You must pay for that".

She says, "How am I supposed to pay it? I do not have..., I have no money".

"Then what can we do?"

She says, "Well, keep her."

Keep the girl, the daughter.

And so this girl goes to school again. The third time she passes by the garden and picks up the parsley.

She says, "What did your mother say?"

"Emm, she said..."

Oh, no I'm getting all wrong, you see.

Yes, the sorceress goes to see the mother and says to her, "Listen, I no longer want you to steal my parsley."

And so the girl goes to her mum and tells her about it and says, "Well, the sorceress complained to me too."

She says, "Well yes, anyway, tell her to keep her⁶⁹," says the mother to the daughter.

⁶⁹ In Italian, the pronoun 'it' does not exist. The pronoun 'her' (*lei, la*) is then used also to refer to a feminine object. The girl cannot imagine that the mother is referring to a person.

So that when the girl goes back for the third time, *she passes by the garden* and picks up the parsley.

She says, "What did your mother tell you?"

She said, "She said to keep her!"

Ah, I was speaking the dialect, now I'm speaking Italian, see?

"She told me you should keep her!"

I will go on in dialect, yes.

And so she says, "All right, you must come here, then".

And now I am speaking Italian again!

[We laugh]

L: A mix is fine.

A: Really?

L: Yes, whatever comes natural to you.

A: *She says, "Then you must come here".*

So this poor little girl began to cry.

"There is nothing to cry for", she says. "Now, tomorrow morning instead of going to school you must go to see the other sorceress, who lives at the end of the village".

The girl knew that the other sorceress was even more dangerous than this one, then her.

She says, "But I don't want to go there!"

She says, "You must go. And you must go there and tell her, 'the other sorceress sent me to fetch the little box, a little box'".

This little girl left, *all worried*. When she was *half way through*, she met *a handsome young man*.

"Why are you crying lovely girl?"

She says, "Oh, the sorceress sent me ...so and so...", she says, "and I must go and get the little box.

I am scared that, that I won't get there because the other sorceress will eat me!"

He says, "Don't be afraid. When you get half the ways there, there is a door. You must open a door. And this door needs to be oiled, no? *It creaks.*" He says, "This the little oil bottle, and you will put this oil on it and it will let you through. So it's all well oiled."

So, she goes to the sorceress's, *she gets the* little box and takes it back to this sorceress here...and he would tell her, "Beware, mind you, do not open it!" "No, no." *She brings the box back.* She says, "Tomorrow morning...", it had all been well, she has not done anything to the little girl because the door had let her through, because by the sorceress's order the door should have killed anyone who tried to pass, right? [...] Anyway she passes, she goes back home, she cries. "Here, this is the little box".

She says, "Tomorrow morning, you must fetch the other one".

So *she says, "All right".*

So she leaves, this little girl. She was crying.

When she's half way through, she meets again this handsome young man. He says, "Why are you crying?"

"Well", she says, "she told me I have to fetch the other box, *but I am* scared, because there the dog there and I am frightened".

So, he gives her a piece of ... a loaf of bread and says, "When you get there, you have already oiled the door, and I am giving you the bread. The dog will jump to eat you, you will give him the bread and he'll let you through, in all tranquillity".

So, she leaves and goes. And she goes to this sorceress's, she gives her the box, she comes back and takes it back with her.

Then she must go and fetch the third. So she says, "Tomorrow morning you will fetch the third and last, then there are none left".

And this poor little girl, all dead, cried and cried. She says, "No, *there is no use in crying, because it's the* last one".

Therefore, she leaves, this little girl. When she was again a little further out she met the young man.

He says, "Why are you crying?"

She says, "Eh, she sent me to get the other little box, but I am scared", she says, "but I am scared".

He says, "Look, when you get there, you have already fixed the door, the dog is settled, now there are going to be some people who clean the oven with *their own hair done in plaits.* You give them this skirt", this cloth, this rag, this piece of broken skirt, "then they will let you through. Then take the box, which is the last one, but I

worn you, do not open it! Because if you open it..., there is the dancers inside". The *dancers and musicians*, right? "Mind you do not open it!"

"No, no". *She goes. She passes the door, and the dogs and then she gives the skirt to the women to clean the oven and then goes to get the thing. On the way back, kids are curious, she opens the box and all the dancers and singers come out! And so she breaks into tears!* And again this handsome young man appears.

"Oh, but why are you crying?"

"Oh, see, I wanted to look into it, then all the *dancers and musicians* came out! What can I do?"

He says, "Do not worry". He had a little wand, and he shook the wand and back in go all the dancers and musicians, and they went back into the box. And she takes it to the sorceress.

He says, "But remember: the sorceress will tell you that tomorrow the cockerel will sing and you will tell her that it was the red cockerel that sang first. Because that's the nastiest and it is poisonous. If she eats of it, she'll die. It cannot be avoided". That's it. It's already finished.

So, she goes home, and brings her this box. The sorceress said then, "How come", she says, "how did you manage to...?"

I mean, she couldn't take all those things back, right? It's impossible isn't it?

So, she begins to say, "Door, why did you not kill her?!" "Because you were making me squeak and she oiled me!"

Then, "Dog, why did you not eat her?!"

"Because you were making me starve to death and she gave me some bread".

"Oh women! Why did you not throw her in the oven?!" "Because you were making us clean the oven with our own hair in plaits and she gave us a cloth instead".

Then she says, "All right, you got away with this, but tomorrow morning, at five, when the cockerel sings, you must tell me which one sang".

That handsome young man was the prince and she says....In the morning *the cockerel sings...*

"Which was the cockerel that sang?"

"It's the red one".

She goes there, catches the cockerel, gives it to the girl to kill and then eats it. And then, of course, the thing [sorceress] died. The witch died. And then the handsome young boy appeared and said, "Listen, I am the prince, but I saved you and now you must marry me".

And then they had a wedding and a feast, I left, and if they're not dead they're still there.

L'Indovinello

Teller: Giacobbe Biondini

March 2004

C'era una signora anziana, 'na vedova, che aveva un figlio. Ma era un po' scapestrato, *cme cme*...sì un po' discolo, sveglia che non ci andava bene niente voleva fare tutto per conto suo. Perché non era poi mica uno stupido, eh? Ma secondo lei non era normale "L'è un ragazz..."

Allora sentirono dire che c'era un re che dava, voleva dare marito all figlia. E quando arrivò questa carta, a casa, lesse. Che se aveva un indovinello che il re o la principessa non potessero indovinare cos'era gli davano in marito la figlia, in sposa la figlia.

Al dis "A g vagg mamma mi".

Al dis "Ma sa vö-t saver d'indvinei!" Al dis, "Te n se gnent!"

"Mi a g vagg!"

Allora era sgomenta questa donna. *Dis, "Mah, e s va a far martirizar!"*

Allora dai oggi dai domani, la convinse a andare da questo re a dirli l'indovinello.

La notte questa signora pensa la dis, "*ma mi no*, non ce lo lascio mica andare. *An gh'e lass mia andar*, la dis, perché se va là i l'amazne. *L è mei ch'e faccia murir mi*".

Ci fece una crescenta, perché erano poveri, *sota al braz a giurma nüatr*, quando c'erano i focolari. Scaldavano la piastra e poi ci mettevano la crescenta sotto, poi la coprivano di braci e di cenere, tanto che cuocesse. Poi ce l'ha avvelenata.

Tanto che morisse.

Infatti alla mattina dice: "Mamma, devo andare."

A dis, "Tö mo alora, t dag un bell fagutin," a dis, "che acsì a t dag dre da manghiar, che tu mangerai quando sei un po' giù in fuori."

A dis, "Va ben mamma a partiss."

Quando fu fuori di casa che andava là per la strada, camina, camina, camina, venne mezzogiorno. C'era una vecchietta a sedere lì da un fossato, *dre un foss*, lì da un fossato. *A dis, "In du andav bell giuvnutin?"*

A dis, "A i ò a andar là d' u rè che völ dar mari a la fiola, che al dis che se mi a nn indvin., s'I nn indivinne brisa l'indvinell...."

A dis, "U sat d'invdvinell pò?"

Al dis, "O a m n'invintarò ün", al gh'e diss.

A dis, "Mi dai una mano che mi è caduto, mi è caduto nel fosso il mio fagotto?"

Dice, "Sì. Ve lo do. Ve la do la mano."

Difatti andarono nel fosso, tiran su il fagotto che c'era e lo portaron su, in nella strada. Quando che fu nella strada, gli disse questa signora,

"Guarda che tua madre ti ha avvelenato. Non lo mangiar mica veh il pane! Dallo al cane prima, eh! Se il cane non muore, và bene, se no...muori tu eh?"

Dice, "Và bene".

Allora quando è un po' più avanti, cammina, cammina, ...Arrivò, si mise a sedere..., dedde..., a sedere per mangiare. Prima ne diede un pezzo al cane. Il cane mangiò questo pezzo di crescenta e morì. Eh..., è morto.

Allora disse, "Ma guarda! Chi mi vuol bene mi tradì, chi mi segue mi morì."

Ma lui aveva fame. Allora attraversavano un bosco. Ruscì a prendere una lepre e l'uccise. E l'uccise. E poi da questa lepre...Era in cinta, *l era pregna*. [...] Era gravida. Allora, saltò fuori i coniglietti, ancora vivi, e vera?

E accende il fuoco con dei giornali, con ...c'era dei giornali in una baracca lì. C'era dei giornali e fece foco e arrostiti questa carne e la mangiò e disse, "Ma guarda! Vidi cose che non viddi," perché vide che non viddi. Vidde la lepre, ma i leprini non li vedeva perché erano nella pancia della mamma.

L. Mmm.

G: Al dis, “Vidi cose che non viddi, mangiai carne creata e non nata, cotta a fuoco di parole.”

E infatti, quando ha mangiato, fece un sonno lì dormì come si poteva. E c’era un fiume d’attraversare. Allora vide che c’era un sasso che ci pio..., che pioveva addosso una goccia. Questa goccia, a forza di piovere, aveva fatto un buco nel sasso. Perché a forza di dai e dai e dai col tempo, c’aveva fatto il buco. *Al dis, “A i ho vist al tener e al dūr furar,”* ho visto il tenero il duro forare. Infatti la goccia è più tenera del sasso, ma riuscì a farci il buco. Dopo traversò il fiume. Nel traversare il fiume, c’era ‘na pecora morta, che l’acqua la portava. C’erano di quegli uccelli che la becavano. *A dis, “Ma veh! A i ho vist al tener al dūr furar, a i ho vist e mort e viv purtar.”* Difatti il morto portava il vivo perché...he, he..

Infatti, andò a ..., quando vide così andò sopra all’argine e s’incaminò. Cammina, cammina antrò nella corte del re.

“Cosa voi?!” gli dissero i portieri lì.

A dis, “Voglio andare dal re! Che ha emesso un bando che ha promesso,” a dis, “l’ha permis ch’e da in spusa la fiola.”

“Ah,” al dis, “ma sì. Altro che che se tu ci dici un indovinello, se loro ci indovinano dopo ti tagliano la testa!”

“Eh, beh, dopo non ce l’ho più.”

A dis, “Mi a g, io ci vado.”

Dis, “Ma lo sai l’indovinello?”

Al dis, “Sì che...Loso!”

“Beh, se tu vuoi passare passa.”

Infatti andò là. Aprirono, tutt’un gran sfarzo..! C’aveva la corte del re, c’era il re in cima al trono, c’erano tutti i suoi..., i suoi camerieri.

Dice, “Beh. Sapete allora questo indovinello?”

Al dis, “Sì che lo so”.

Al dis, “Me lo dica. Altrochè che se noi non c’indoviniamo, vi tagliamo poi la testa eh! Se c’indoviniamo”.

Al dis, “Beh, s’a gh’indvina..”

Difatti c’era tutti i maghi là! Con quei libroni, alti!

A dis, “Diccimo il tuo indovinello”.

Al dis, “Chi mi vuol bene mi tradì,
chi mi segue mi morì,
mangiai carne creata e non nata,
cotta a fuoco di parole.
A io vist al tener e düür furar,
a io vist e mort e viv purtar.”

“*Eh, ma*”, *al dis*, “mai sentito un indovinello così.”

E allora, interrogarono tutti questi maghi, questa gente, questi dottori che avevano attorno, ma...Leggi i libri, ma...Quell'indovinello *a n gh'era dubie ch'i gh'indvinassne*.

Pensa, ripensa...Allora questa ragazza, la piangeva, *dis*, perché non lo voleva mica sposare lei.

Al dis, “Eh, bisogna che la sposi”, *al dis*, “perché, la parola del re non si viene a meno. Quando dico una parola bisogna mantenerla, a costo della vita.”

Alora dis, “*Beh.*” Gli *dis so* padre, “Ma vai prendilo, perché vedrai che quando sei fuori di città, io ti mando dietro l'esercito..., ti mando dietro la polizia, è vera. Ti faccio riportare a casa e uccidiamo il giovane.”

“*A va ben.*”

Allora prepararono tutta la sua dote, prepararono la carrozza, prepararono tutto. Dopo piano piano si avviarono..., eh perché piangeva lei. E suo padre era sgomento. “Ma non ti sgomentare”, *al dis*, “che, vedrai che ci penso io.” Difatti, lui dice, “Questi qui mi fanno un qualche trucco per prendermi”, *dis*, “ma non mi prendono mica. Avrò fatto su un tre, quattro chilometri, sente: tin, ton, tin, ton, tutto l'esercito che veniva dietro a loro. Tira fuori un sacchetto. Lo apre, ci venne una gran nebbia! Allora, si disorientarono perché davanti a lui c'era sereno, ma di dietro c'era la nebbia. Una nebbia fitta, fitta. Cammina, cammina, riuscirono a passare la nebbia.

Allora lei dice, “Oh, senti? Mio padre ha già passato la nebbia”.

Al dis, “Adesa ci metto il bosco.”

“Come fai?”

Tira fuori un pettine, mette il pettine in terra, ci viene un gran bosco. Ma fitto! Un bosco fitto e grande. “*Sta a vder* che si fermeranno!”

Invece quest'esercito incominciò con le accete, con...Lavora, lavora, lavora, riuscirono a passare anche dal bosco. Quando fu un po' avanti che sente ancora l'esercito venire avanti. Sente l'esercito che camminavano.

"Oh, c'è mio padre che arriva."

Al dis, "Come faccio?"

Allora si ricorda, che mi son dimenticato che questa vecchietta gli aveva dato un sassolino, in tasca. E gli ha detto, "Quando ne hai bisogno tocca il sassolino."

Difatti tocca il sassolino, ...compare questa vecchia. "Cos'hai?"

"Eh", *al dis*, "prima ci ho messo la nebbia, poi c'ho messo il bosco, adesso non so più cosa fare perché son qui che arrivano."

A dis, "Ci penso io. Faccio sbattere le montagne assieme!"

(fa il rumore con le mani).

Allora quando incominciò con le montagne a sbattere, uccisero tutti i soldati perché...se le montagne si sbattano. Allora loro furono liberi, e andarono a casa.

Quando furono a casa, prima di arrivare a casa vedono un bel castello, alto, di lusso, con una corte, con tutti i servitori. In cima alla porta c'era sua mamma.

L: Di lui?

G: Di lui! Che l'aspettava.

L: Eh!

G: Perché la vecchia poi era una fata. Gli aveva detto...

[...]

Infatti, l'hanno ricevuto, l'hanno salutato. So andati in casa, si sono sposati. Ian fat un noz e un trabgozz, mi ma gh min via s'in gh'ien mort a in t ca via.

The Riddle

There was an old lady, a widow, who had a son. But he was a bit reckless, like, like...yeah a bit restless, he wasn't happy with anything, he wanted everything his own way. But he wasn't dull, right? But to her he was not normal, "He's a guy..."

So, they heard that the king was looking to give a husband to his daughter. And when this piece of paper arrived at their home, he read that if someone put a riddle that the king or his daughter could not solve, then he would be given the daughter as a wife.

He says, "I'm going, mum."

She says, "What on earth do you want to know about riddles?" She says, "You know nothing."

"I'm going!"

So, this woman was quite taken aback. She says, *"But, he's going to be martyred!"* Anyway, talk today, talk tomorrow, he convinced her that he was going to the king's to tell him the riddle.

During the night, this lady thinks. She says, *"I'm not going to let him go, because if he goes they'll kill him. I'd better kill him myself."*

She baked him a bannock, because they were poor, underneath the red coals we say, when there were fireplaces. They used to heat the griddle and then put the bannock underneath it and cover it with red coals and ashes, as long as it cooked. Then she poisoned it! So that he would die.

And in the morning he says, *"Mother, I must go."*

She says, "All right then, take this bag with you," she says, "so you'll have something to eat, which you will you'll eat when you will be outside the village, further down the road."

He says, "All right mother, I'm off."

When he was out of the house, going down the road, he walked and walked and walked and it came to midday.

There was an old lady sitting *by a ditch*. She says, *"Where are you going nice young fellow?"*

He says, "I must go to the king's. He wants his daughter to get married, and he says that if I do not guess..., no, that if they don't solve the riddle..."

She says, "But, do you know any riddle then?"

He says, "Oh, I'll make one up!" he tells her.

She says, "Can you give me a hand with my bundle? It fell in the ditch."

He says, *"Sure, I will. I will give you a hand"*.

And so they went down into the ditch and brought the bundle back up, on the road.

When they were on the road again, this lady said to him.

“Beware, your mother poisoned you. Do not eat that bread, ok?! Give it to the dog first, right? If the dog doesn’t die, then it’s all well..., otherwise you will die, understand?”

He says, “Right.”

So, when he is a bit further down the road, he walks and walks. He got to a point where he sat down to eat. First he gave a piece of his bannock to the dog. The dog ate and died. Yes, he was dead.

So he said, “Mm, look. Those who loved me betrayed me and those who followed me died.”

But he was hungry. They were crossing a wood. He managed to catch a hare and killed it. And killed it. And then, this hare...*it was pregnant*. She was pregnant and so the little rabbits came out, still alive, you know?

And he light the fire with some newspapers, with...there was a hut there with some newspapers in it. There were some newspapers and he made a fire and he roasted the meat and ate it. And then he said, “How interesting, I saw things I didn’t see,” because he saw things he didn’t see. He saw the hare, but he didn’t see the little hares because they were inside the mum’s tummy.”

L. Mm.

G: He says, “I saw things I did not see, I ate meat that was conceived and not born, cooked on a fire of words.”

When he finished eating, he fell asleep there, he slept how he could. And there was a river to cross. And then he saw that there was a rock there on which..., on which a drop was falling. This drop, by its constant dripping had worn a hole into the rock. Because by dripping and dripping, with time, it had worn a hole.

He says, “I saw the tender piercing the hard.” And actually a drop is softer than a rock, but it managed to wear it all the same. After this, he crossed the river. While he was crossing it, there was a dead sheep, carried by the water. There were birds pecking it. *He says, “Oh, look! I saw the tender piercing the hard and I saw the dead carrying the living.”* And actually, he had seen the dead carrying the living, because...eh, eh..

And so he went, ...when he saw this he moved to the dyke and walked along it. He walked and walked and walked and got to the king’s court.

“What do you want!?” the servants there asked him.

He says, “I want to see the king! ’Cause he put out a proclamation where he promised he would give his daughter’s hand...”

“Ah,” *he says*, “that’s true. On the other hand, if you say a riddle and they solve it, they will cut your head!”

“Well, then I won’t have it anymore!”

He says, *“I am going!”*

He says, “But do you know the riddle?”

He says, “Yes, yes I do indeed.”

“Well, if you want to walk through then, do.”

And so he went there. They opened. It was all very luxurious. There was the king’s court, the king on his throne; there were all his waiters....

He says, “Well, do you have this riddle then?”

He says, “Yes, I do have it.”

He says, “Then tell me it. But if we solve it, we shall cut your head, right?”

He says, *“Well, if you solve it.”*

And there were all the wizards there; with those big, tall books.”

He says, “Tell us your riddle.”

He says, “Those who loved me betrayed me,

those who followed me died.

*I ate meat that was conceived and never born,
cooked on a fire of words.*

I saw the tender piercing the hard,

I saw the dead carrying the living.”

“Mm, but,” *he says*, “I have never heard a riddle like this.”

And so they consulted all the wizards, all those people, those doctors surrounding them, but...

They could read the books, but...*That riddle, there was no way they could solve it.*

Think and think again...And in the mean time this girl was crying, because she did not want to marry him.

He says, “Well, you must marry him,” he says, “because the word of a king cannot be withdrawn. When I say something I must act accordingly, at the cost of my life.”

So he says, "Well", *her father says* to her, "Go ahead, take him. And then you'll see that once you are outside the town, I will send my army after you. I will send the police, right? I will have you taken back home and we will kill the young fellow."

"All right, then."

And so they prepared her dowry, the carriage and everything. Then they slowly moved away. And she was crying.

And her father was disconcerted, he says, "Do not be alarmed," *he says*, "I will settle everything."

And so, *he* (the young fellow) *says*, "These people here are going to play some trick on me. But they won't catch me!"

They were probably three or four kilometres away, when they heard: tin, ton, tin, ton! The entire army was after them. He pulls out a little bag. He opens it, and a lot of fog comes out! Then, they are all disoriented, because ahead of them it is clear, but behind them it's foggy. A thick fog, thick. They walk and walk and they manage to pierce the fog.

Then she says, "Hey, can you hear? My father has already pierced the fog."

He says, "Now I am going to put a forest there."

"And how will you do that?"

He take out a little comb, he puts it on the ground and a big forest grows out of it. A thick forest! A forest so thick and so big! "They'll have to stop now. You'll see".

But the army instead, started with axes... They worked and worked and they succeeded to walk through the forest too. When they had reached a bit further down the road, they heard the army approaching again. They heard the army walking.

"Hey, my father is coming!"

He says, "What am I going to do?"

Then he remembers, because I had forgotten that this old lady had given him a little rock he had put in his pocket. And she had told him, "When you are in need, touch the little rock."

And so he touched the little rock and this old lady appeared.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Well," *he says*, "first I put the fog, then the forest, and now I do not know what to do, 'cause they are just about to get here."

She says, "I'll take care of it. I will make the mountains hit one against the other."
(He makes a noise with his hands).

And when the mountains started to bang one against the other, all the soldiers were killed, because...well, if two mountains start hitting one against the other...you know...

And so they were free and they could go home. Before they reached home, on the way there, they saw a marvellous castle, tall, luxurious, with a court and all the servants. And by the door, there was his mother.

L: His mother?!

G: Yes, his mother. She was waiting for him.

L:Mm.

G: Because the old lady was a fairy...

And so they welcomed him and saluted him.

They went home they got married and ...*I left and if they're not dead, they're still there.*

Note

I collected another version of the first part of this story (in which the young man shares his *focaccina* with the old lady). This episode, in a slightly changed version, was adapted to the village reality. In it, an old lady, tired of the demands of a man who regularly used to ask her for food and never gave her anything in return, bakes a *focaccina* for him and poisons it. On his way home, the man meets a fellow who is returning from the *Macchia*. The young fellow being hungry, the man decides to offer him half of his *focaccina* and the young fellow dies. As it turns out, he was the old lady's son. The story was told in order to convey the moral that evil deeds will eventually turn against the offender. It is an instance of an episode of a traditional tale being turned into a cautionary legend.

La Gaggia Magica

Teller: Olga Giannasi

June 2006

C'era in tempo di guerra, c'era poco da mangiare. E allora c'era mio padre e suo fratello che si chiamava Giuseppe - mio padre si chiamava Emilio Pioveva un giorno. E allora mio padre dice con suo fratello, "*Veh, Iuseff, andomma a catar ün pò d castegn per chi ragazz*, perché lui c'aveva solo una figlia, ma mio padre ne aveva tanti. Aveva undici figli, perciò immagini. Di due mogli però, ma eravamo undici fratelli. Al dis, "*E quasi quais se d'matina e piövv a i andomma, se l è brütt andoma a castegn. I partissn, camina camina, eh*, Monte Modino lo sa dov'è? Sì. Passarono monte Modino e andarono a rubare le castagne, perché, sì, si andav in quello degli altri. Noi non ce l'avevamo, eh, il castangneto non c'era. Una di qua, una di là, riempiroo i suoi sacchi e poi tornarono a casa, solo che pioveva tanto forte che quando arrivarono, a Cà de Vanni – conoscevano due persone, conoscevano tutti, perché allora si conosceva tutti. C'era una si-, una donna donna che l'as chiamava Barbarina e so mari as chiamava Scardell. E suo marito *l'era anda...adessa la dig mez in italian e mez in dialet*.

L. Come vuole lei.

O. Eh no, mi torna meglio, è più detta bene in dialetto, perché è più...

Alura Scardelll l'era andà a Munt Fiurin che c'e – a gh'era la fera, la fera ed San Michele, me par che fussa, sì la fera ed San Michele – a vender i boh, perché en nn gh'era più sold. E la Barbarina la ste in cà, perch'a piuvida. Sol che la Barbarina, la cgnusiva ün fra. Anche questa , racuntarla lè...ha, ha, ha... Alura, inte gnir a Cà d'Vanni, i truvonn una cornacchia, mezza morta. Sa la cornacchia cos'è? Un uccello. Ma era tutto bagnato, infreddolito. I andevn. I bussonn, e la barbarina a s chirdiva c'a fussa qual c la stava... insomma. E allora e acse, eh, "An gh'è mia, en gh'è brisa Scardelll, l'è andà a la fera". "Eh", al dis, "a deintr ün mument," lei la cgnusivn, "A se sugamma un pò parchè gh'è n'acqua che..." La dis, "va ben." L'atizza ün pò il fög, la dis "L'è mei c'a i andav d e d suvr ch'a gh'è piò cald," dis, "che ch'è a n gh'è brisa tant cald." Ma e gh'è di tassé cun dal tavul, no? E tra na tavula e cl'altra

a ghe stava sempr un, un büs...ha, ha, ha. Mio padre l'era più fürb che Iuseff. Iuseff l'era un po' pü ..., an ghe 'rivava brisa propria. N'era brisa acsì malign, giomma, via. I van d e d suvr, e quand e s muvìv e tassè e feva trecc, trecc. Al dis, "La Barbarina, la s'à mandà chì perché la g'à na qualc mira veh, secund mè." Va ben. I vedn c l è lì che la fa la crscenta fritta, la frigge 'sta crscenta – e gh'era al camin cun la padella, l'era sot al camin – "Senti che bon udor ed crscenta fritta? Chi g'arala mai?" Eh, pò li stenn lì. L'era gnu anch fredd perché l'era fredd ed suvr no. Dopo un po' i sent bussar. A la mett la tvaia in cima a la tavula, l'aparecchia, cumpra di piatti, insomma... "Eh", al dis, "le trata ben ben a Scardelll", Iuseff, no? Al dis "Sta a vder a Scardell." I bussn, toc, toc, eh, la va a avrir. "Ah, buona sera, buona sera, la pace sia con voi," ha, ha, ha. Me pà a dis "E quest?" L era un fra, ha, ha, ha..., era un che, ha, ha, ha... Me mà la g bravava quand e s la cuntava, no? Un fra'cl'andeva a la cerca, cioè l'andeva a la limosna per portar poi nel convento. La dis, "Meno male che t'è ariva," al dis, "che me ariva du, ch'in ed Frasnur, a nn voi ch'i s vedn." La dis, "A 'te sgagghie, a mangiomma la crescenta." Al dis, "Mi a i ho purta na butia ed vin..." Va ben. I s metn lì, i magnen la crscenta e i bevn la butiglia ed vin, me i fen brisa in temp ch'arivò Scardelll. Siccome,...la fera,... i s bagnò. El piuviva, anch a Mont Fiurin l'era bagna. E chiama la Barbarina, "Barbarina, Barbarina!" La Barbarina la n respund. Intant che la mettì la crscenta dentr...a na madia, un..., la butiia la dentr, e pan..., somma la scundì tuta la roba in t i mobil. E me padr l era lì ch'al guardava, al dis "A voi sta a vedr 'sa la fa." E po' dopp a la fin la n sa indo mettr e fra. La gi "ades in d' e mett?" "Mett le sut u lett." L'usava chi lett, elt, acsì [fa il segno dell'altezza]. Allora, sto pover fra' l'era anch gross. L'andè sot u lett, quand e gni Scardelll dis, "G'aveva miss tant, 'sa fev?" "Eh, abia pazienza, a durmiva," dis, "a m'era apisulada," la dis, "alora, l'è per quel che l è gnu tard, pò a i ho mess du legn in te fög..." Va ben. E 'somma e s cambia. Si leva la giacca e si mette all'asciutt e pò e se scalda. Me pà lè d ed suvr, a tacca, a far schichiular, ste tas-, il paviment e feva cre, cre, e s ciamma tassell, in dialett, eh? Cre, cre, a dis, "'Sa gh'è d' suvr?" "Eh", dis, "nient, 'sa vö-t ch'i c sia?" "Com 'sa vot ch'i c sia?" A dis, "Sent, un lavor acsì, bisognerà che vaga a vder." "No! Ma e t matt? Te t va tör n'ifredulita lassù!" "No, no, adessa a g vagg." Quand l è lì che l'avriss l'üss ed sta stanza e ved me padr e

me zi Iuseff che i ternavn da e fredd e i gavn sta curnacchia in mana. “Ma chi, chi va miss chi?” “Eh la tu muiera la s ved ch’a g devn fastidi, c’a gnissn chi d ed suvra a siugars” “Eh, già, l è ‘na povra mattarella, abbia paciencia,” insomma e la scusò. E va ben. Al dis, “Adesa bisierne c la Barbarina fa quel da manghiar,” al dis, “che in cà d Milio...” perché mio padre era come me, era ospitale, che chiunque arrivasse in casa gli offriva da mangiare anche s’an ghe n’avn.

Alura al dis, “Da manghiar a cà d Milio a gh sunn sta tanti volti,” al dis, “alura, fag quel.” Al dis, “Ma n’avama mia bsun veh? Nu atr a gh’abioma n’usel, a gh’abioma st’usel ché chì che s dis, es fa da manghiar, l’è magic.” “Eh, capirà, s’l’è vera!” Non ci credevano no naturalmente. Non ci credevano. Al dis, “No tal dig mi.” E le la giva “Ma pover matereli in da liv cata? A l’anam mia vist ché.” “Eh,” al dis, “a l abiomma truva lassù, s l han da, no ch’a l’abiomma truva, l’abiomma paga anc car.” Puvrina, ‘sta povra gaggia la strizzavn un po’ la feva “ghe, ghe!” E ‘lora al dis, “Adess t facc gnir fërra d la crescenta fritta,” a dis, “acsè a la magnom.”

Stricn st’üslin, puvrin, “Ghè, ghè.” “Sa l ditt Milio?” Dis, “Speta c a t al di. L’a ditt acsì che la d’ dentr la ghè na gama ed chersenta fritta.” “Ma, Barbarina tōla ed cià!” “A la tōg cià, ma te dat a ment a chi povr materee lì? Iin propria ed Frasnur veh?” E invece a gh’andò da sé, la tirò in cià e a dis, “Eh, a gh’è la crescenta fritta da bun,” a dis, “lè magica da bun.”

Ah, al dis, “ma mia c’a ghe bvomma dre anc na butigla.” Allora, i stricn ancora stu povr üüslin, “Ghè! Ghè!” “L’a dit acsì che la dentr a gh’è na butiglia ed vin ad che bon.” “Barbarina tōla ed cià!” “Eh, no eh, no.” Invece la, la g’andè lu e gh’era la butiglia ed vin. E l’al dis, “L’è ch’ormai l’à fni la magia, ormai, la dis sul tre cos e po’ la n’in dis pu.” Al dis, “Fag dir la terza.” Sta puvra gazza senza vus la giv, “Ghe, ghe, ghe...”

“‘S’al dīt?”, “C’a t ga l diavul sut u let!”

“Al diavul sot u let?!”

“Sì, sì! Cunferma c t g’a u diavul sott u lett!” Al dis, “Adessa a g fomma la cura nüatr!” [ridiamo!] Allora, mio padre prese una forca, perché c’avevan la stalla lì attaccata e cos, Iuseff i g den un bastun e quel’altr al dis, “Me a tog e furcar, anch a mi”, no, prese un legno con la punta. Allora ste [ride], al dis, “Ti Scardelll mett t là,

da l'üss, e quand' e passa picchia fort. Tu Iuseff, cun la furca mandel förra e mi l'istess perché s'a g somma in du e vin förra, se no a n vin brisa." Capià, sto pover fra' suda, russ, anch da la vergunna perché, l'era sta svergugna ste fra. E poi da sut u let e ghe steva anch mal. Fat sta che sping e sping, e fu obliga a gnir förra. Quand e fu förra, me padre e g'al dé, me zi Iuseff e g'al dé, l'arivà cuntre Scardelll, l'era förra da l'üss, e gh' dé tant al gran bott che s'arbaltò, in mezzo alla via. "Eh," al dis, "a gh'i rasun ch'è al diavul, l è al diavul travesti da fra!" Al dis, "Eco, ma t l avne ditt!" Allora al dis, "Adesa a s' famm u segn d la crus e..." E stu pover fra', l arturnò a Frasnur, mezz mort, ha, ha, ha, e 'n ghe gni mai pù in ment d'andar a Cà d' Vann.

E in de fratep, me padr e so fradell i partin, al dis, "Andomma a cà, perché l è un po' smiss ed piov e po' abiomma fredd, andomma a cà nostra. Ciapne i so sachet ed castegni e vegn a cà. E Scardell al dis, "Ma c' fortuna aver..." Ah! Al dis, "At fag anch e cos, at pag l'uslin, s'a me lasciad," a dis, "acsì, invece ed far far da manghiar a la Barbarina, a gh'ho bele." Al dis, "No a n' te doma brisa, perché sa tu, e s fa cunt anc a nu atr", me pà e gh giva, "me a cà mia a gh'ho tant ragazz, l'è mei ch'el tgnomma nüatr." "Ma a t dag cinc mareng," ch'erano non so se erano poi cinquecento lire, saranno state, cinc mareng. "No, m'è tu matt?" la ghe giva so muiera, "Ma povra ti veh! Ta ved cl'è lì che mor?" "No, no da pur chì." Eg de ste sold. Allora me padr e mi si Iuseff i partin ed cursa e i gni giù pre, pri pra, non nella strada ma per i prati, cun ste sac ed castegn. A un cert punt me padr al dis, "Sa t sa i ho pensà? A metomma chi i castegn," al dis, "perché tra poc l è chi Scardelll. A metomma al castegn chi c'al tlomma dmatina," dis, "tant l'è d'nott ormai." Sul ch'i pasonn de d' lì c'a gh'era dal vac, e i manghiavn. E ce n'era una, questa è un po' scabrosa, ma gliela raccontiamo, lei ce la mette se vuole. C'erano delle mucche, che manghiavn. Però, l era brut temp insomma, a g n'era una che c'aveva la diarrea....um... E c'era, e ghe gisse cun quel c l era dre al vac, "Ma magna cla bestia lì?"

"Ma l è da inco a mezz dì che n la sta brisa benn. Adessa a vag a cà." "Fermet ün mument, e po' s'a vedet Scardell dig, c'a somma passa d ed là." Va ben. Ariva Scardelll a dis, "Iv vist Milio e Iuseff?!"

Al dis, "No". "E qui du giù d lì, chi eni?"

"Ah, iin du chi fan una magia"

"Eh", al dis, " 'Sa fani?" Al dis, "Mo, andag a vder perché i m han manda via perché i voln brisa ch'a l'impara". Quand l è arive l', l'à vist ch'eren "Foma na magia!"

"Oh, al vostr magi, la gazza l'è morta."

"Eh, t la stricada tropp fort!"

"Nooo! M l i dada c l era bele meza morta!"

"No, no, t a vist ch l'a catada tuta la roba, la catà anc al diavul. T'ariss anc da ringraziars."

"E adessa sa siv dre a far?"

A dis, "A somma dre a far un esperimenti. Ti s guard, ma passa un pò d'en ccià." Va benn.

I fenn "Filurin, filurin, filurera, questa l'è la cova dela mela. Filurin, filurin, filurera, questa l'è la cova dela mela". Intanto tenevano stretta la coda alla vacca. A un cert punt, sta vacca, a n'in psiva pù e lù i se scanson e la g'la fè tuta adoss a ste Scardell, ha, ha, ha...

Al dis, "A no chiapà tant eh del cos del"....speta cum as dis in dialet? Del ciaparell!

Al dis, "A m' n'an fat in tant, perché a u so c'na sun brisa tante sgagghie." Al dis, "Ma una come questa a m la pagad! A dmenga andam a beber, sul perché l'ib savuda far tant ben, e dmenga andam a bover da..." Un c lè bele mort, che gh'ava l'usteria, e s chiamava [...] Da Francesco.

Al dis, " E Dmenga a i andoma da Francesco a bover un bel fiaschin ed vin", a dis, "amic cme primma."

Al dis, [ride] Al dis me padr, "Acsì, ag n in fe una ed tuti al fate e pò i g fe pagar anch il fiasc!"

The Magic Crow

There was little to eat during wartime. And so, there were my father and his brother, whose name was Giuseppe – my father's name was Emilio....It was raining one day. And so my father with his brother "Hey, Iuseff, let's go to pick up some chestnuts for those kids, because he had only one daughter, but my father had many. He had

eleven children, therefore you can imagine. From two wives though, but we had eleven brothers and sisters. He says, *"Well, if tomorrow it rains, we'll go, if the weather is bad, we'll go to pick up chestnuts. They set off, they walk and walk, and, Mount Modino, do you know where it is? Yes. They went beyond Mount Modino and went to steal chestnuts, because, yes, we used to go in other people's fields. We did not have it, we did not have a chestnut field. One here and one there, they filled their bags and then they came back home, only, it rained so heavily that when they got to Cà de Vanni – they knew two people there, they knew everyone, because in those days we all knew each other. There was a la-, a woman who was called Barbarina and her husband was called Scardell. And her husband had gone to...now I am telling it half in Italian and half in dialect.*

L. As you wish.

O. Eh, no, it feels more natural, it sounds better if told in dialect, because it's more....

And so Scardell had gone to Monte Fiorino for there is – there was the Fair of Saint Michael's, I think it was, yes, the Fair of Saint Michael's – to sell I don't know what, because there was not money left. And Barbarina stayed home, because it was raining. However Barbarina knew a friar. This [story] too, when told it is..., ha, ha, ha... And so, one their way to Cà de Vanni, they found a crow, half dead. Do you know what a crow is? A bird. But it was all wet and shivering. They went there and they knocked on the door, and Barbarina thought it was the one she was [waiting for] ...anyway. And so, like this, and "He is not here, Scardell is not here, he went to the fair." "Eh," he says, "let us in for a moment," she knew them, "so that we can dry off a bit, because its pouring down like..." She says, "Fair enough." She stokes up the fire, she says "You'd better go upstairs, because it's warmer," she says, "because it is not that warm here." But there are floorboards, right? And between one board and the other, there was always a gap...ha, ha, ha...My father was smarter than Iuseff. Iuseff was a bit more..., he wasn't that quick. He wasn't that cunning, let's say. They went upstairs and when they would move the boards would go trec, trec. He says, "Barbarina sent us upstairs because she's got some plan, I think", well then. They see that she is making some fried crescenta;⁷⁰ she fries this

⁷⁰ A kind of focaccia typical of the area.

crescenta – there was the fireplace with the pan, it was underneath the fireplace –
“Can you smell this nice smell of fried crescenta? Who will she be having around?”
And then they stayed there. It had also become cold, because it used to be cold
upstairs, right? After some time, they heard a knock on the door. She puts a cloth
over the table, she dresses it, with plates and everything...” Eh,” he says, “she treats
him well Scardell”, Iuseff, right? He says, “Sure, you’ll see if it is Scardell.” Another
knock on the door, toc, toc, and she goes to open the door. “Oh, good evening, good
evening, Peace be with you,” ha, ha, ha! My father says, “And this one?” It was a
friar, ha, ha, ha...My mother used to scold him when he would tell us this
story, right? A friar who was making a collection, which is he was asking for alms to
then bring them to the convent.” She says, “Thank God you have arrived,” she says,
“I’ve got two men, from Frasnur, I don’t want them to see us.” She says, “Hurry up,
let’s eat the crescenta.” He says, “But I have brought a bottle of wine...” That’s fine.
They sit down, they eat the crescenta and they drink the bottle of wine, but they
haven’t finished when Scardell got back. Because, at the fair...he got wet. It was
raining, also in Montefiorino it was wet. And he calls Barbarina, “Barbarina,
Barbarina!” Barbarina does not reply. In the meantime she is putting the crescenta
inside... in a cupboard, a..., the bottle inside..., the bread....anyway, she hid all the
food inside the furniture. And my father was there, watching, he says, “I want to see
what she does.” And the, in the end, she does not know where to put the friar. She
says, “And where shall I put him now?” Put him under the bed. There used to be
those beds, tall beds, like this [she mimes the height of the bed] And so, this poor
friar, he was also fat. He went under the bed [she smiles], when Scardell arrived he
says, “It took you so long, what were you doing?” “Well, be patient, I was asleep,”
she says, “I had fallen asleep,” she says, “and so that’s why it took me so long, then
I put some wood in the fire...” And so that’s it. And anyway, he gets changed. He
takes off his sacket, he puts it to dry, and warms up.
My father is upstairs and he starts, he makes these boards creak, the floor was going
cre, cre, it’s called ‘tassel’ in the dialect, right? Cre, cre, he says, “What’s
upstairs?” “Eh,” she says, “nothing. What could there be?” “What do you mean,
‘what could there be?’” He says, “Listen to this. I must go and have a look.” “No!
Are you crazy? You are going to catch a cold up there!” “No, I’m going now.” When

he gets there and he opens the door of the bedroom, he sees my dad and my uncle Iuseff who were shivering and had a crow in their hands. "But who, who put you two here?" "Eh, your wife, maybe because we were bothering her, [she told us to] come up here to dry off." "Eh, well, she is a poor foolish little woman, be patient," and so he excused her. And so that's fine. He says, "Now Barbarina must cook something to eat," he says, "because in 'Milio's house..." Because my father was like me, he was hospitable, so much so that whoever showed up at home, he would give them something to eat, even if we did not have any. And so he says, "I have been given food in Milio's home so many times," he says, "so cook something." He says, "But we do not need any, you know? We've got a bird, we've got this bird here, which, it tells us, it makes us food, it's magic." "Yes, sure!" They did not believe him, of course. They did not believe it. He says, "No, I tell you." And she was saying, "But poor fools, where did you find it? We haven't seen it before around here." "Well," he says, "we found it up there, we were given it, we did not find it, we paid a lot of money for it." Poor thing, this poor crow, they squeezed it and it went "ghe, ghe!" And so he says, "Now I'll make some fried crescenta appear," he says, "so that we can eat it." They squeeze this little bird, poor thing, "Ghe, ghe." "What did it say Milio?" He says, "Wait and I'll tell you. It said that, inside there, there is a big piece of fried crescenta." "But Barbarina, bring it here." "I will, but how can you listen to these fools? It shows that they are from Frasnur!" And so he went by himself, he opened the cupboard and said "Eh, here is the fried crescenta, it's really here," he says, "it really is magic [that bird]." "Eh," he says, "but we must also drink a bottle with it." And so, they squeeze this little bird once again, "Ghe! Ghe!" "It said that there's a bottle of good wine in there." "Barbarina, bring it here." "Oh no, oh no!" And so he went, and the bottle of wine was there. And he says, "The thing is it has nearly finished its magic, it only says three things and then no more." He says, "Make it say the third." This poor crow, without voice, it cries, "Ghe, ghe, ghe..." "What did it say?" "That you've got the devil under your bed!" "The devil under the bed?!"

"Yes, yes! It confirms that you've got the devil under your bed!" He says, "Now we'll find the remedy for it!" ha, ha, ha, [we both laugh].

And so my father took a pitchfork, because the barn was just there, by the house, *and they gave a stick to Iuseff and the other says, "I'll take a pitchfork too." No, he got a pointy stick. And so these...ha, ha, ha...he says, "You Scardell, place your self there, by the door, and when he comes out, hit him strong. You Iuseff, with the pitchfork, push him out [from under the bed] and I'll do the same, because with the two of us, he'll be forced to come out."* You can imagine, this poor friar, all red, because of the shame of having been exposed. And then, under the bed, he was also uncomfortable. Anyway,. Push and push, he was obliged to come out. When he came out, my father hit him, my uncle hit him,, he arrived face to face with Scardell, who was outside the door, and he hit him so much that he fell over, on his way out. "Eh," he says, "You were right, it was the devil, it was the devil disguised as a friar!" He says, "Well, we had told you so." And so he says, "Well then now we'll do the sign of the Cross." And this poor friar came back to Frasnur, half dead, ha, ha, ha, [we both laugh], and he never even thought of going back to Cà d' Vann again.

And in the meantime, my father and his brother left, and said, "We're going home, because the rain is lighter and we are cold, we're going to our own home." They pick up their bags full of chestnuts and they come home. And Scardell says, "But how lucky to have..." Oh! Yes, he says, "I'll pay for the little bird if you give it to me," he says, "so that, instead of getting Barbarina to cook, I already have my food." He says, "No, I won't give it to you, because it is useful for us too," my dad had, "I have so many children at home, we'd better keep it ourselves." "But I'll give you five mareng," which were like, I don't know if they were like five hundred lire, they must have been, five mareng.

"No!" "Are you crazy!?" his wife was saying to him, "Silly you, can't you see it's dying?" "No, no, I do want it. Give it to me." And he gave him this money. And so my dad and my uncle Iuseff set off running down the fields, not by the road, but by the fields, with these bags of chestnuts. At some point my dad says, "You know what I've thought? We'll put the chestnuts here," he says, "because in a short time Scardell will be here. We'll leave the chestnuts here and collect them tomorrow morning," he says, "because it is night time anyway." But as they walked away, they passed by a spot where there were a few cows, and they were eating. And there was

one – this is a bit rough, but I'll tell you it anyway. Then you'll see if you want to include it [in your collection of tales].

There were a few cows, who were eating. But, the weather was not good, anyway, and there was one cow which had diarrhoeaum....And there was, he said to the man who was looking after the cows, "But is it eating that poor beast there?" "Oh well, it has not been well since midday today. I'm going home now anyway." "Wait a minute, and if you see Scardell, tell him that we went that way." That's fine. Scardell arrives and says, "Have you seen Milio and Iuseff?!" He says, "No." "And what about those two over there, who are they?" "Oh, those are two men performing magic." "What?" he says, "what is it they're doing?" He says, "I don't know, go and take a look if you can, they sent me away because they did not want me to see what they were doing." When he got there, he saw them in the middle of performing, "We're doing a magic trick!"

"Oh, sure, you and your magic, the crow is dead."

"Oh well, you must have squeezed it too hard."

"No, it was already half dead when you gave it to me."

"No, no, didn't you see that it found all the stuff, it even found the devil. You should only thank us."

"And now, what are you doing?"

He says, "We ate in the middle of conducting an experiment. You can watch, but you have to come closer." And that's fine. They said, "Filurin, filurin, filurera...this is the apple's tale. Filurin, filurin, filurera, this is the apple's tale." In the meantime, they kept hold of the cow's tail. At a certain point, this cow couldn't keep it in any longer and they moved quickly away and it did all on Scardelll, ha, ha, ha....

He says, "I was played lots of [trick]... "I was played lots of tricks," he says, "because I am not that smart." He says, "But a trick like this, you'll have to pay for it! On Sunday we're all going to drink a bottle of wine, just because you were able to play the trick so well, on Sunday we're all going to drink at ...," a man who has already died, who had an inn, his name was [...] At Francesco's.

He says, "On Sunday we'll go and drink, and drink a good bottle of wine," he says, "and we'll be friends as before."

He says, ha, ha, ha. My father says, "And so, not only we played him all sorts of tricks, but we even made him pay for the bottle of wine!"

Mezzettone⁷¹

Teller: Olga Giannasi

June 2006

Deve sapere che in parrocchia a Frassinoro c'era un prete [...] che si chiamava Don Fiori, e poi c'erano i suoi contadini che avevano le bestie nella stalla. E un giorno s'è presentato uno che arrivava d'in Garfagnana, che i suoi erano stanchi di averlo in casa perché mangiava tutto. Allora gl'han detto "È ora che ti vai a guadagnare da mangiare". Dopo l'arrangia lei come crede. Eh... "È ora che ti vai a guadagnare il mangiare perché noi non sappiamo più cosa darti, c'hai mangiato tutto." Sto povero ragazzetto parte con una giacca in spalla e viene, cammina, cammina, viene dalla Garfagnana, arriva fino alla Badia. Ah dice "Dove devo andare? Busserò alla porta del prete che lì accolgono tutti. Vedere se mi trova qualcosa da fare, mi da qualcosa da mangiare." Bussa, arriva sto don Fiori, apre e dice "Chi sei?" "Sono uno che mi chiamo Mezzettone e son venuto a vedere se posso trovare da lavorare a da mangiare." "E quanto vuoi?" "Non voglio niente, voglio solo da mangiare." 'Ce "Va bene, per stasera vai a dormire nel fienile, domani guarderemo d'aggiustare qualcosa."

Sto ragazzo si prende su, va nel fienile. Va a dormire, poi il mattino si alza dice con sto parroco "Eh, sono venuto a far colazione," dice. "Prendi la tazza e il latte." Lui prende e dice, "Ma io no, non mi basta quella lì. Prende la caldaia dove facevano il formaggio, che era piena di latte, e gliela mangiò tutta. E poi le mangiò anche due pani. Allora dice, "Questo qui mi mangia anche me!" Dice "Beh, adesso che hai mangiato vai a lavorare. Prendi i buoi, col carro, te li fai dare dai contadini di sotto e vai a tagliare la legna nel bosco, il mio bosco." E c'era uno che si chiamava Ariosto [...], ci va a insegnare la macchia, dice, "Questo, quel metro qui ci tagli un camion di legna, per il prete." Va bene. Lui guarda questa macchia e dice, "Sì, sto

⁷¹ Olga told Mezzettone entirely in Italian. It could be due to the fact that she used to tell the story to her grandchildren who were the first generation, in the seventies and eighties, to be less familiar with the dialect.

dietro a tagliar tutta questa...Faccio così, ” al dis, “faccio poi come voglio.” Mette la corda attaccata a una pianta e poi ci gira intorno, a sta macchia. Le da uno strattone e viene via tutte, tutte i faggi. Aveva una forza disumana, diciamo [sorriso nella voce]. E allora, poi carica sto carro, dice “Ma non ci sta tutta.” Comunque ne mise nel carro, addosso ai buoi, dove stavano. Poi alla fine incomincia a far camminare sti buoi, sti buoi non camminavano. Erano troppo carichi, non camminavano più. E lui cosa fece, prese su carro e buoi e se li mise in ispalla. E arrivo in piazza a Frassinoro. Quando vide [risata nella voce], quelli della piazza videro sto, sto Mezzettone che arrivava con.... “Oh! Cos’è successo, cos’è successo! Una slavina ha portato via la macchia del prete.” Invece arriva dice, “Qui c’è la legna.” Sto povero prete dice, “Era la legna per la mia vita. Adesso non m’è rimasto niente.” Allora, “Fa niente”, dice, “la mettiamo apposto, poi dopo...la brucerò piano, piano.” Va bene. “Eh,” dice, “dai che io ho fame adesso.” Allora c’era i contadini, che una si chiamava Concetta, era una zitella, aveva giusto fatto il pane. C’era una loggia, perché era ‘na parroch-..., sì n’abazia antica, c’era la loggia col portico e sotto c’era sto pane, si sentiva odore di pane cotto. “Eh,” dice, “vai dalla Concetta, fatti dare un pane.” Andò da ‘sta Concetta e dice, “Datemi il pane. Ha detto Don Fiori che mi date il pane.” Sta povera donna dice, “Ma è il pane di una settimana!” Dice, “Ha detto che me lo mettete nel cesto che glielo porto su.” Va bene. C’era poi attacca la canonica e la casa dei contadini e la stalla, era tutto un ...E allora, va bene. Le da sto pane, sto Mezzettone va a casa, vede che c’è la, ‘na pentola di minestra, mangia tutta la minestra, poi si mette, mangia tutto il pane. Eeeh [mamma mia]! Questo Don Fiori dice, “come farò mai a mandarlo via adesso?” Dice, “Ma come faccio?” Insomma. Uno dopo l’altro, le combina dei guai in, tutto. Scoprì la casa..., fece tanti guai. Eh, un bel giorno si stancò. Dice “Adesso basta. Adesso devi tornare a casa perché sei stato qui anche troppo, insomma.” E sto Panettone, dice mio nipote, dice “No sto qui, vi prometto che mangio meno, ma sto qui ancora un po’.” Va bene. Andava ad aiutare un po’ in campagna i contadini, ma non lo volevano, perché rovinava, dove passava lui tirava via tutto. Allora succede che un giorno sto prete s’era arrabbiato. E’ poi corta, è ‘na favolina...

S’era arrabbiato e dice “No, adesso te vai a casa, perché m’hai rovinato tutta la roba, m’hai...” “Ah”, dice, “io vado a casa? No, adesso va via lei, che qui ci sto io!”

Questo povero prete andò lì per sgridarle e lui le diede un calcio e lo mandò là [indica oltre il monte con lo sguardo e la mano], passato Lama Mocogno. E' mai più ritornato sto prete.

[Ridiamo]

E Mezzettone, non mi ricordo come è andata a finire, bisogna finircela un po' così insomma.

Mezzettone.

You must know that in the parish in Frassinoro there was a priest [...], his name was Don Fiori...., and then there were his peasants and they had animals in the barn. And one day, a guy who came from the Garfagnana showed up, because his parents were tired of having him in the house, since he used to eat everything. And so they said to him, "It's time you earn you food."

Then you can arrange it [the story] as you wish [she interrupts to address me directly].

Well, "It's time you earn your living, because we do not know what to give any more, you have eaten everything we had." This poor guy leaves, with his sacket on his shoulder, and walks, and walks, he walks from the Garfagnana all the way to the Badia [the village church]. He says, "Where am I supposed to go? I will knock on the door of the priest, because everyone is welcome there. We'll se if he can find me something to do, and gives me something to eat." He knock on the door, this Don Fiori arrives, he opens the door and says, "Who are you?" "I am one whose name is Mezzettone and I came to see if I can find some work and some food." "And how much do you want [to be paid]?" "I don't want anything, I sust want to eat."

He says, "That's fine, you can sleep in the hay-barn for tonight, then tomorrow we'll try to arrange something different." This guy sets off and goes to the hay-barn. He goes to sleep and then in the morning he gets up and says to this priest "Well, I came to eat my breakfast," he says. "Get a bowl and some milk." He gets it and says, "But not [for] me, that is not enough for me." He lifts the cauldron in which they used to make cheese, which was full of milk, and he [drinks] all of it. And then he ate two loaves of bread. And so he says, "This [guy] is going to eat me too!" He says, "Well, now that you have eaten, go to work. Take the ox and the cart, get them from the

farmers [who were working for the priest] down there, and then go to cut some wood in the thicket, my thicket." And there was one whose name was Ariosto [...] he goes with him to show him where the wood is, he says, "With this rope you will cut a van load of wood for the priest." That's fine. He looks at the thicket and says, "Sure, no way I'm going to waste time cutting all this...I'll do this," he says, "I'll do as I like." He ties the rope to a tree and then he turns all around it, around the whole thicket. He pulls it strongly and it all comes out, all the beech-trees. He had an inhuman strength, so to speak [there is a smile in her voice]. And so, then he loads this cart, he says, "It does not all fit in." But anyway he put most of it on the cart, one the back of the ox, and where it could fit. Then, in the end, he begins to make these ox walk, but these ox did not walk. They were too laden, they could no longer walk. And what did he do, he took lifted cart and ox and he put them on his shoulder. And he arrived to the square. When they saw [laughing voice], those people in the square saw this, this Mezzettone who was coming with... "Hey! What's happened, what's happened! A landslide must have taken the priest's thicket away." Instead he arrives and says, "Here is the wood." This poor priest says, "It was the firewood for my life. Now I'm left with nothing." And so, "Never mind," he says, "we'll store it, and then I will slowly burn it." That's fine. "Hey," he says, "come on I'm hungry now." And so there were the farmers, and one of them was called Concetta, she was a spinster, and she had just made some bread." There was a loggia, yes because it was a church..., yes an ancient abbey, there was a loggia with the archway and under it there was this bread, one could smell the freshly baked bread." "Well," he says, go to see Concetta, get her to give you a loaf." He went to see this Concetta and says, "Give me a loaf. Don Fiori said you should give me a loaf." This poor woman says, "But this is the bread for the whole week!" He says, "Don Fiori said to put it in the basket here and I will bring it to him." That's all right. Then there was the priest's house attached to it, and the house of the farmers and the barn, it was all one...And so, that's all right. She gives him this bread, this Mezzettone goes home, he sees that there is a, a pot of soup, he eats the soup, then he starts, he eats all the bread. "Eeeh [mamma mia]!" This Don Fiori says, "How am I ever going to get rid of him now?" He says, "What can I do?" Anyway. One after the other, he causes all the trouble in the world. He unroofed the house..., he caused all sorts of trouble. And, one fine day he got tired.

He says, "Now, that's it, now you must go back home because you've been here too long, anyway." And this Panettone, as my grandson calls him, says "No I'll stay here, I promise you that I will eat less, but I am going to stay a little longer." That's all right. He would go and help the crofter in the fields, but they did not want him, because wherever he touched uprooted everything. And so, it happens that one day this priest was angry. It is a short [story] after all, it's a *favolina*.

He was angry and he says, "No, now you are going to go back home, because you have ruined all my stuff, you have..." "Ah," he says, "I am going home? No, now you are going home, and I will stay here!" this poor priest went there to scold him and he kicked him and threw him there [with her hand and with her look she indicates beyond the mountain], beyond Lama Mocogno [a village on the other side of the mountain]. He never came back, this priest.

{ we both laugh }

And Mezzettone, I can't remember what happened to him, I must end it a bit like this, anyway.

Appendix 3

The Original Transcriptions of the Humorous Narratives in the Corpus and Related Narratives.

1) Allora, posso raccontarne una io? Ma una cosa vera però eh, perché voi altri non la sapete, almeno le donne, gli uomini la sanno. Va a vedere che anteguerra, prima della guerra, c'era uno, era il figlio di Carletto, Carlett. Come si chiamava non me lo ricordo nemmeno io.

Fernando. Angiolin.

Dino. No, quello ch'è andato in America.

Tullio. Olinto.

Dino. Olinto, era Olinto. Passa da quella strada lì... Mio babbo, mio babbo naturalmente era là che lavorava, vero, era falegname. Lo vede passare, dice "Olinto dove vai?"

Aldina. Questo poi è uno scherzo, non è una tragedia eh?

D. Devo parlare in dialetto o in italiano?

L. Come vuole lei.

Dino. Capiscono anche il dialetto eh, questi qui.

L. Come si sente più a suo agio.

Dino. A, me lo sento a tutte le maniere. Allora passa lui *naturalment*, "Dove vai?" *a dis*, "Vado a Montefiorino a farmi la fotografia." "Eh," *al dis*, "ma hai bisogno d'andare a Montefiorino a farti la fotografia? C'ho la macchina fotografica io." *Al dis*, "Però devi venire tra un quarto d'ora, venti minuti." Allora prepara su il cavalletto, e poi non usava la macchina fotografica con un telo nero sopra, no? C'ha messo il telo, quando è stato il momento è ritornato lui, dice, "Mettiti in posa". L'ha messo così, dice, "Girati un po', un po' cosà," insomma. Lui è andato sotto il telo nero, si è slacciato i pantaloni, li ha lasciati andare è vero, per terra. Ha girato il sedere a questo qui..." Tac, la fotografia è già fatta"

Fernando. Foto fatta!

Dino. Dopo, si sono corsi dietro per il paese, perché lo voleva uccidere!

Aldina. Questo in mezzo alla tragedia, è quello che ci vuole.

2) [...] *Adessa.. mi a facc una pausa, mi, no? Perché va a vder che er sira, e me gnu in ment che fat lì. Alura a sun anda su da Fernando, a go ditt "Oh Fernando, bsogna che t'me facc un piaser" "E sa vö-t c a t faccia? A digg, "miarev che t'me purtass a Palagan" "C a t porta a Palagan! A far cosa?" A digg "Perché a voii indagar in dva l è la tana du luv" [Tutti. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha....]. Perché a i abioma d'andar acsì e csì e dman là giù da Oliviero, a i abiomma da cuntar sta fola chì. Però, s'an g*

abiomma quel ed cuncre, [tutt: "Eh, si eh"] e chi s credd? Ningun! Allora al dis "E quand g andomme?" "A g andomma dmatina prest", stmatina.

{Risata generale}. Stamtina al see s somma lva sù [Onelia. Eh, sì] , e po' a somma ande a Palagan. "Eh, ma cme fomnu a saver in dva l è la tana du luv?" "Eh", a digg, "l è facil. A i andomma da l'aministrazion comunel, a i andomma la da, da u sindic, c a nn e cgnusomma gnanc, e a s presentomma, come esperti naturalmente in tutta la zona. E infatti a somma ariva a Palagan, a somma anda da u sindic, u s ha ricevu subitt eh. A n'abiomma mia ditt c a i ern ed Frasnur eh!? Perché senno i n s'arevn maii mai...indicà in da l era la tana du luv. E dopp int e sentir che nüatr a i ern interesa in dva l'era sta tana du luv al dis "Eh, ma vi accompagno io" Benissim! Vers Chingh ed Vetta [una località]... Alura mi, pr e primm, perché a descuriva mi perché lu u stava un po' zitt. Sì lu e nn è brisa un gran ciacarun cme mi. Alura, a i ho gvardà la tana, e mi a ved cme da chi a lì.

A digg "A sun negr" A m'immedesimava quell c l era sucess alura. A g ho ditt, "Fernando, fa e piaser, gvarda un po' pù giù, a vder se t me po indicar, cme l è fatta sta tana du luv". Infatti e g ha gvarda al dis "Eh, ma u s ved fin un bell pezz in giù e po dop la svolta. An ved po' mia più giù che lì eh."E basta. Finita lì. A i archiappomma natüralment vera i caciadur...

3) Mio padre..., Giacobbe, ti e tutti, sapete, era un tipo piuttosto allegro, come circa sono io. Non sono così, così come lui, però quasi. Allora va a vedere, a i ern in cà di zia Mariuccia, *qvand a g ava l'usteria sa t? E allora i ern lì acsì*, che i giugavn a briscola a più non posso. *E g era Calisto anc. Allora me padr ariva lì, e vist c a g è Calisto...dove ho fatto quella ferramenta, quell'affare lì nell'orto, l'orto era tutto cintato con una siepe, te la ricordi? Allora lui cosa fece? Partì d'in casa, andò dietro alla siepe e poi fece i suoi fatti, perché era così mio padre, e lo ricordo volentieri anche per quello lì. Fece i suoi fatti, poi va là a giocare a briscola e dice, "Oh, se c'è qualcuno che i me ven a idar a chiappar na galina*, io gli do un sigaro o due [interruzione perché si comincia a mangiare].

D. Allora va a vedere che ...[...] *l andè lì acsì*, lui sapeva che Calisto, lo conoscevate tutti, no, che era lui che diceva "*Venbi!*" "*A ven bi!*"

Maria. *Quell l è ver.*

Marco. Vengo io.

Dino. *A ven bi!*

Tullio. Parlava così.

Dino. Parlava così, eh? Eh, "*E m è scapa na galina in t l ort, chi m ven a idar a chiaparla, gli do due sigari*" "*A ven bi!*"

Pronto, partirono tutti e due, andarono nell'orto, perché non c'erano luci pubbliche come adesso, eh, c'era tutto buio.

Lo guidò naturalmente in qua e in là e poi dopo "Sta attenti che dovrebbe essere circa qui così." Andò a finire naturalmente, dove lui aveva fatto i suoi....

Va a vedere quando arriva, "Dai, dai, ch'è lì!" Ooh! Non l'avesse fatto. Dop..., i bagni non c'erano, da nessuna parte, c'era l'acqua corrente è vero...

Tullio. Alla fontana pubblica...Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha...!

Dino. Sì, "Dobbiamo andare è vero alla fontana pubblica, oh, e poi ti laverai come puoi." { Onelia. *N l ava mess in cimma e capell?* } Però lui gli diede i due sigari.

Fernando. *Ma e g mete l capello.*

Dino. No, no, no, e andè la senza il cappello, con le mani. Eh, aveva paura di schiacciar la gallina.

4) *Alora i van a let, Tugnin u s mett a let.* Sai, lui aveva sonno. Era stanco perché, con tutto quel...E lei invece è andata in bagno, è andata in bagno – aveva comprato una camicia dalla, dalla Maria di Giacobbe, perché allora vendeva le camicie e allora, eh – e allora aveva comprato sta camicia tutta bella, tutta trasparente, e si mette la camicia e poi si presenta a Tugnin.

A dis, “Oh!” a dis, “Guarda un po’!” Alora lui l’ha guardata un pochettino, malamente come ci vedo io adesso, al dis, “Beh, e c nuvità e la questa chi?” Al dis, “Mah, e tu spes, in da l a t cumpra c la camisa lì?” “Ah, a l ho cumpra da la Maria d’ Iacob” Al dis, “Da bo!” al dis, “t a spes anch chi sold lì.. Dop aver spes tutt quant i sold, e tra sunadur e tra tutt quanti, e pranz, e, e cene e tutt..., ah, a g manca anch quel lì”. “Eh”, la dis, “sì eh! Oh,” la dis, “ma, te n vra mia c a fomma in c la manera lì?” Lei ha detto con Tugnin. A dis, “Mi a sun tant stüff guarda, che...A nn, a nn star dre vera a cusar...” Perché lui, aveva capito che aveva delle intenzioni lei, eh. La dis, “Mah, mah...” Orca l’oca! Lei, non soddisfatta, è ritornata in bagno, si è messa un’altra camicia: prima ce l’aveva nera, e poi se l’è messa celeste, sai tutta traforata, tutta, un bel lavoro. E’ ritornata là. Allora, lui c’aveva gli occhi semichiusi, c’aveva un occhio...Alora al dis, “Oh, imbambii!” Lei gli ha detto: “Oh imbambi,” al dis, “guarda un po’!” Al dis, “Beh, e questa? Perché e t cambie camisa?” Al dis, “Perché a i ho cambie camisa?” al dis, “s a li ho cumprad!” “Anche questa qui t’ha cumpra, sempre dalla Maria?” “Eh, sempre dalla Maria.” “Ah,” al dis, “andoma ben,” al dis, “Dopp po’ u s tucara ben de star senza manghiar per ot dì”

Tullio: *La in vindiva, la in vndiva tredes per na duzina.*

D. E allora, macchè. Al dis, “Dai, dai, met a let, e fala fnida veh, cun tutti e ste nuvità.” “Eh”, a dis, “va ben a m metero a lett, ma credm che, a fnirla acsì a sun mia tant persuasa, eh!”. Ritorna in bagno, naturalmente, e poi si ripresenta a Tugnin. Era quasi addormentato, eh, l’ha, l’ha s-, l’ha scussa amod e lui l’ha avert un occhi. E dis, “Questa?!” Al dis, “Questa l’è la camisa cl’a ma fat me mader”. Al dis, al dis, “Però, a ste mumente chi, l’a ghe psiva dar anch na stiradina!”

[Ridono a crepa pelle]

5) Dunque, io mi sono sposato voi sapete nel ’47, no. Macchine fotografiche sapete non ce n’erano. Eravamo poveri, più poveri via, di adesso, no. E allora io ho fatto il viaggio di nozze. Ho fatto il viaggio di nozze, son partito di qui sono andato da mia sorella, a Bolzano. Lassù, l’Anna, della Preti, mi aveva messo a disposizione il suo appartamento, no, e mia sorella stava di sotto, da noi. Noi eravamo su. Alora quando siamo arrivati lassù, naturalmente, mio fratello naturalmente mi aveva dato giusto la macchina fotografica.

[Risata generale]

Sai, eh, ha, ha, ha, non sapevo nemmeno doprarla. Non sapevo mica adoprarla. E allora lassù ci sono i diversi ponti, e allora usava che sui ponti c’era il fotografo che faceva le fotografie, al turista che passava di lì. E allora loro c’hanno visto come due turisti, eh. Al dis, “Questi qui sono due turisti, senz’altro!”

Tullio. Eh, fotogenici.

Dino. Sì. Al dis, “Signore faccio la fotografia” “Ma non vede che c’ho l’arnese qui? E’ inutil che faccia le fotografie”.

Son ritornato a casa da mia sorella *a digg*, “Va a finire che, prima che io finisca il viaggio di nozze, mi litigo con il fotografo” “Beh, non farai mica quella lì eh?” “Ah, *a g vagg a vsin* eh! Perché non posson mica..., ma, debbono capire che se c’ho l’arnese, *a im ven a far la fotografia*. E io non conto niente!” Va a vedere che le fotografie però io con quella... Allora dico, “Dobbiamo andarci a far la fotografia Aldina,” almeno avere un ricordo, no, almeno una. Adesso ne fanno trecento, chi ne fa poche, se no, son da trecento in su, altrimenti non viene mica il fotografo, eh. Non ci va mica il fotografo.

Allora siamo andati da Alcapone, siamo andati dentro, lo studio fotografico sai bello. C’era una signora sai bionda, a tavolino, che prende le ordinazioni, no? Allora, ci siam messi a sedere perché era impegnato il fotografo. Allora io con l’Aldina dico, “Mah,” dico, “siamo venuti in un posto che, va a sapere quanto costerà la fotografia”. Dico, “Sai come facciamo?” Chiedilo all’Aldina [rivolto all’Onelia], non dico mica delle storie, eh. A dico, “Sai come facciamo Aldina? Dì che ti senti male e poi andiamo fuori. Oppure stai attenta a quanto paga quello là quando passa alla cassa,” no? “Secondo quanto paga [batte le mani due volte come dire ‘già fatto’], diciamo: “Andiamo fuori, perché si sente male, torniamo domani,” non ci conoscon mica. Allora, è venuto il nostro momento che ci han detto di andar dentro allo studio fotografico. Fari sai, di qua, di là, da, per tutte le parti, a dig, “*Chi a pagam [...]. Arcordet, c l è acsì.*”

Allora c’ha fatto la fotografia, dice, “Come le vuole signore il busto?” Perché l’Aldina stava zitta, eh. Parlavo io. Basta. Dico, “le voglio proprio al naturale, io sa.” *Al dis*, “No,” *al dis*, “sono migliori a mezzo busto, sfumandole.” “Eh,” dico, “era la mia signora che le voleva così. Naturali. Io mi va bene a mezzo busto.” “Allora le facciamo a mezzo busto.” Mm, va bene. Allora dopo son passato alla cassa, per dire, vero... Allora, “Quante fotografie dobbiamo fare?” “Mah,” gli dico, “una, due.” “Eh,” *al dis*, “ma, già che abiam fatto il negativo, da farne una a farne sei, su per giù.”

Fernando. Eh, siamo lì.

Dino. “Mah,” dico, “era la mia moglie che ne voleva solo una, così, per ricordo di Bolzano.” *Mi*, ma è vero poi che *mi a ghe giva acsì*, eh? E ciao. “Eh,” dico, “allora ne faccia sei.” “Le facciamo col ritocco o senza ritocco?” “Ah no eh! Mi acsì proprio! Le vogliamo naturali, senza ritocco!”

“Ma sa nella fotografia ci potrebbe esser qualche cosina, che non quadra proprio bene, viene ritoccata. E sarà la questione di due, tre lire ogni fotografia di differenza.”

Anna. E allora!

Dino. “E allora ritocchi! Cosa vuol che sia per noi!” E ciao. Allora dopo io dico, “Guardi, che le fotografie verrà poi una mia sorella”...

Fernando. A ritirarle.

Dino. “...a ritirarle, perché noi...tagliamo l’angolo quand’è il momento.” E ciao. Quando mia sorella è ritornata là a ritirare le fotografie: “Ma mi deve dire, quel signore. Era suo fratello?” *Al dis*, “Sì.” “Che tipo!” *al gis*, “dava tutte le colpe alla sua signora. Lui non voleva il ritocco, lui voleva na fotografia solo, lui mezzo busto, e sempre la [colpa a lei]...”

In conclusione, ne facemmo sei. Quando siamo arrivati a Frassinoro, abbiamo cominciato a distribuire le fotografie. Eh, ma sei *a s fa prest an [...]*? Allora, in conclusione che le fotografie le abbiamo distribuite, subito. “Urge,” io ho telefonato

naturalmente a mia sorella, “urge fotografie, perché qui vanno a ruba!” dico. E quando ci è ritornata dice, “Eh, ma un tipo del genere!” “Eh, lui è fatto così.”

6) *A t l ho d'aver cuntada a te* quella della zia Menga. Quando si son sposati erano giovani, non era come adesso che, adesso...

Marco: *I fan al provvi.*

G. *I fan al provvi, c la cumpagnia, ma na volta...! Me zia Menga, l'era giuvna – giuvn era lù, e l'aveva desiderie [...] E infatti, arivò a la sira, i andenn a let, e le a la svelta, a la svelta la s desvestì, ma Massimo a n gniva brisa a let.*

Fernando: Eh, no!

G. *Al dis, “M'oi tì...”*

Maria: *L era là in snocc c al giva al so preghier.*

Marco: *E giva u rusari.*

G. *Al guard in da l era, l era a snocc in cimma a na scranna, nanc un quadr, ch'e pregava lù, sai era usanza, vera...Al dis, “M'oi ti, t'en crderà mia che vegna u spiritu sant cun mì?!”*

Fernando: *Eh, questa l è bela!*

{risata generale}

6a) Il matrimonio dello zio Massimo con la zia Menga, te l'han raccontato cos'han fatto? Ecco è lì che a lei è rimasto in mente lo Spirito Santo! Quando si son sposati, e son andati a casa, son andati in camera, era il periodo della novena dello Spirito Santo. Allora mio zio ha detto, “Adessa, primma ch'a se svestomma e ch'andamm a let, a fomma la nuvena du Spiritu Sant.” Solo che lui la sapeva a memoria, mia zia non la sapeva per niente, perché non l'aveva mai fatta lei la novena dello Spirito Santo. A dis, “Oì tì, as a mtam in snocchi, a tacca la nuvena dal Spiritu Sant, sul che mi a n la sava brisa! Facevo, bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, bla, mentre lui diceva su, perché non volevo far brutta figura c a n la sava!” Ha, ha, ha, ha....

[Rido]

S. *A dis, “Perché dopp a i ava anc paura che al giss, ‘Oì tì, ma allora me a nn te vöi mia pù veh!’”*

[ridiamo] Anche lei era simpaticissima. Hai capito? La sera del matrimonio! Ecco perché li chiamavano i patriarchi.

6b) Maria. “Ah e quand la mattina l'andò da so madr?Cunte quella.

Giacobbe. Eh?

Maria. *La mattina, al mattina dopo. La nn andà da som mà?La giss, “Oh mamma,” la dis, “ma sempr'acsi?” “Eh,”la dis, “Menga, sempr'acsi!”*Ha ha, ha, ha...

7) [Una volta i nostri vecchi, e poi anche noi, si andava a lavorare in Sardegna, in Africa o in Francia, si andava via, cinque o sei, o sette mesi. E mi ricordo che c'era uno di Casa Gianasi – non faccio il nome perché nn e sta brisa benn, è vera – el gni a cà d'in Sardegna il mese di maggio. Sua moglie, era un anno che si erano sposati, l'era see o sett mes, ch'i ern senza...compagnia, dgiomma acsi ... e infatti quand el gni a cà, l'ha fatt un bel pranz, na bella cena poi, quand'arivò l'or d'andar a lett al dis “Alora, cm'andommia?” al dis, “Ma mi a i ho sunn, ghe give lù, a sun stüff” “Ma dai,” insomma, “Porta pacencia,” al dis, “dmatina, se mai, s a g la cav, ed matina.” Ha, ha, ha... E venne, allora le la s persuasiva [...], e se durmì, l'atend un pò e pò la

se durmì. Ma l'ava presia le, al dis "Capiraa," al dis, "giuvna cm'a sunna, a tribular csi tant" [Dino ride moltissimo]. Allora, siccome aveva l'abitudine che tutti avevano delle bestie da dar da mangiare, *i g avn al vacc in t la stalla. E quand, la g deva da manghiar le, l'andeva a guvernarli la matina*, solo che fino a verso le sei, le sette, *i n g'andevn mia a darg da manghiar, e le la s'arsedò, dis, "Speta un pò c a vag a gurnar al vacc ..."*

W. L'asn.

G. Eh?

W. L'asn.

G. *No, no, l'av al vacc! Allora l'ande in t la stalla – l'era prest, ste pover besti i ern tut aciacad, "Ve t na Madunn", al dis, "anc a vu atr! A tog un baston. An s'ri mia ste in Sardegna anc a vu atr?"*

[tutti ridono tanto]

8) *At cunt anch statra ormai*, un'altra. *L'è un po' differenta. Na volta i gh'aven la casa, sotto c'era la stalla, del bestie no* [si rivolge a tutti che approvano], *i gavn la stal sutta...*

Maria: *Ma quella lì poi veramente, priss far a men...*

[tutti ridono]

G. *E allora, ed suvra i gh'avn la camra e la cusina, la cusina, po i gh'avn la pared d legn, po i gh'avn la camra, pò i gh'avn la ribalza, perché quand'i evn bsugn i avanzavn d'ander in te praa. I andevn in t la stalla, vera, i avn na scala...*

W. Era il bagno, notturno.

G. Eh, allora, l'ambiente era quello lì. *In t la not, i gh'avn quatr o cinq videi, cun ste bestie e del, du lat al vacch i g n fevn pog, sti pover besti. Fat a sta che, s'a vot a vder: e s g'ha mola un videl, allora, tute ste besti mu, mu, ma, ma. "Angiola!" E s chiamava Angiola, al dis, "Angiola", al dis, "sent tu che a gh'è in d la stalla che s'e d' esser mula una bestia" "Eh", la dis, "adesa a g'andarò a vder". Allora l'usava che i gh'era* [si alza per far vedere e perde l'equilibrio e tutti ridono], *a g'era cal pataiin, lung acsì. L'andè giù dala scala, pian pian, po' ciapp e videll, per ligar i videll e s archinò. Chi videll ch'i ern dre...* [ridono perché lui mima l'azione] *E g chiapò tutt in bucca! E po' a tirava e pù l gniva e lù, pù al....*

Dino: [ride e mi dice] *Che non vada mica a raccontare quelle cose lì, lassù, in Scozia eh!?*

9) Mio padre era un tipo csi, gli piaceva scherzare con tutti. Allora va a vedere che c'era uno che si chiamava Dorando [...] Allora va a vedere, *e feva e falegnam, me pader, no*. Va a vedere *ch'a gh'era un so amig*, che doveva sposarsi. [...] Allora va a vder *che naturalment va quest Canacc i l chiamavne, "Fasöl, gnierrev ch'et me fesa l cumudin perché a m'ho da spusar.*

Te l'ho raccontata?

L. No.

D. Siii. *E allora al dis, "Eh va ben, quand'et te spus tu?" Al dis, "a ma spus tra quindes dì".* Dico così [intende dire che dice un periodo a caso]. *"Va ben. Doma ben". Allora va a vder che dop, il padre, e papà ed Giuggi doveva avere un filio, che s'era sposato prima. Al dis-, viene da, e ven da me padr, a dis "Oh, Fasöl, bsnierrev che t'am fesa la cuna, ch'a io d'aver un pupin o na pupina". Al dis, "A g'ho l'impegn ed far al cumudin", al dis, "a Canac, ma", dis, "a foma acsì", al dis, "im*

ven in ment adesa: a fas la cuna e po' a la port a Canacc", eh? "Però, quand a g la port, mi a t avis, e ti t venn in di paragg,"che c'è ancora la strada eh, c'è ancora eh.

A. Lì da Fernando.

D. Lì da Fernando, lì vicino attaccato a Fernando. *Al dis, "Va ben."* Infatti, fa la culla, e fa la cuna, naturalmente, *pò se la mette in spalla, va lì, al dis, "Canacc, avris l'us!"*. Sai, perché c'erano tutti i soprannomi e, *a gh'era tut i soprannum, no. Al dis, "Ah, e gh'è Fasöl che m'ha purta e cumudin"*. Quando ha aperto la porta, ha visto la, *la vist la cuna...uuuuuhhhh!*

A. E' andato in scandescenze.

D. Perché, *perché lu e gh'ava pu dit cun Giorg, e papà d Giuggi, al dis, "acsì, a sentomma biestmar Canacc"*, perch'è uno che bestemmiava che non ti dico! Quando ha aperto, apriti o cielo, *tanti al gran biestem che mai!*

"No, ti t'ma urdna la cuna".

"No, ma vot dit c'at vag'a urdnar la cuna c'a m'ho da spusar? Eh! Allora, e pasa Giorg, a dis, "S'a gh'a iv da litar?"

"Eh, dis, che bischer lì", a dis, "e m'ha purta na cuna ch'a gh'ho urdnà al cumudin!" "No, ti t'ma urdnà la cuna! T'an m'ha urdnà al cumudin!" Somma un debac che non finiva, non finivano più. *"Eh", al dis, "non sara mia la fin de mund", al dis, "la cuna a la cumper mi", Giorg, no? Al dis, "E l me cumudin?" "Beh, di cumudin, intant a andoma giù da me surella," all'osteria, no? "E poi lì a i n parlamma."* Hanno cominciato a bere un bicchierotto due e tre, capito? *"E al cumudin e te l fass dopp che t t è spusa"*.

10) Alba. Na volta era [suo padre] in Sardegna, era in Sardegna. Allora, non sapevano scrivere tanti e scriveva uno della compagnia. Allora, quando scrivevano a casa, scriveva questo, e quello leggeva a, a li altri e poi dopo riscriveva per, eh... quello che non sapeva scrivere. Allora, c'era uno di Sassatella, con loro. *Al dis, "Arriva na lettera e c'era scritto ch'era morto sua moglie."* Allora non sapevano come dirglielo. A dis, *"Cm'a fommia.."* Allora, dice, *"Eh, sa gh'è, che nuvità a gh'è?"*, perché quando ...

Tutti. Eh, eh.

Alba. *"Eh", al dis, "del nuvità mia tant belli avrem da dir, che, l'è mort vostra muiera"*

Al dis, "Da bon!? Allora scrivivg, giv che i m portn la pella, c a la bastun!" [ridono]

11) Allora, dato che hai parlato del bensone me ne viene in mente una. Và a vedere che io ero in licenza naturalmente, io e Tobia, e doveva partire la Maria d'la Sasdella. E era una famiglia abbastanza benestante, e la mamma era disperata perché la Maria voleva partire per andare a servizio. Arriviamo noi altri due in casa, un pochino masnadieri. Naturalmente la mamma sai ci ha raccontato *"Eh la me Maria la vol andar via, la vol andar a Firenze."* Naturalmente sai ci mettiamo lì, *"Eh ma g a tu bsugn d'andar a Firenze?" mi e Tobia [said]. Eh sì, a voi andar a Firenze, perché me sun stuff de star chì, tant chì a n s ciappa nient e van via tutt e quant i me amigh."* Cosa abbiamo fatto, le abbiamo fatto sciogliere la valigia, c'aveva un bensone le abbiamo mangiato tutto il bensone e lei è stata a casa. Allora la mamma

dice, "Oh Dino, se la me Maria l'as met in testa d'andar via, o a t'avis eh? A t'avis per ché naturalment.."

12) Ah Giuggi, *quela ed Giuggi. Giuggi quand l è andà*, andava a soldato, no? Andava a soldato e la Turruncina l'ava fat al bensun. *Quand l è ste in staziun a Bulugna, a gava al bensun sotto braccio no, a gava al bensun sut u bracci e addirittura qualcuno a gh'e rubò. I gh' an riusì a turl via e ...*Ci rimase la carta.

13) Allora ve ne racconto una, ve ne racconto una di due reclute che andavano a militare no? *L'era e to Sesto e Ismino*, no. Sesto e Ismino a la mattina *e van giù in curera, quand'i arivn a Modna, i avn d'andar a trovar, un*, uno di Frassinoro insomma, che abitava giù a Modena. Allora, han girato lì e poi si sono messi, davanti al portone, davanti al portone, uno da una parte, uno dall'altra. Passavano, la gente passava e vedevano sti due..., poveri ragazzi e allora gli davano l'elemosina...Eh, ma abbiamo tanto riso con quella cosa lì! *Al dis, al dis*, "Abbiamo imparato il metodo..."

D. Di guadagnare senza lavorare.

14)Alora Giuggi chiede alla Sara se vuole andare a castagne con lui. Vanno a castagne, arrivano all cà. *Al dis*, "Nduma al Caselle." Andiamo alle caselle. Piovigginava un po', arrivano alle Caselle incominciano a raccogliere le castagne e *n fan su des quendes chil*. Arriva il padrone del castagneto e *al dis*, "Sa fal?" "Eh *al dis, a catamia del castegn*." *Al dis*, "M'elgni vostri?" "No! Mo ve l pagamia." "No, no," *al dis*, e alor a ciapò al sac e rovesciò tutto.

A dis, "Dop sa fommia, bisogna c'andam più inanz. Attraversiamo un orto dove c'erano gli alveari" – traversar l'orto che c'eran gli alveari *e dentr e gheran i begh*. *Al dis*, "A mi e me ferun mia gninta, a la s e ghe s'infilò su per la stanella." "Die ...Dio mama, o Dio mama," *al dis*, "Oh Dio me cül, oh Dio me cül." "Eh," *mo dis*, "cm a famia." Eravamo da soli *al dis*, "Ma cosa faccio." Allora questa donna, oh, dolorava, incominciò a picchiarle un po', a darle degli scupaccioni insomma. *E l'a vist c'a tacvn a venir giù dal begh mort*. Allora, cadevano queste api tramortite. Eh, ma, ne aveva fatto un mucchio così eh! E lei continuava a dire che c'aveva ancora dolore. Allora *la dis*, "Go on, go on..." E va beh, lì per lì sembrava tutto risolto. "Proseguiamo, 'Dio mama e me cül, o Dio.'" "Eh, *al dis*, "adesa, 'm'al begh an ghen pù'. 'Ma me am fa un mal' 'Al dis a ghé li bsighi. I pungiglioni no? La questione è che erano molte, saran state due o tremila {Tutti. Ooooh!!!}.Così dice lui.

Alora dice, "Incominciavi a fare l'operazione," *al dis*, "potete immaginare. Ho fatto questo mucchio di cose." "Eh", *la dis*, "adesa a stag un po' mei." Allora si avviano per andare a casa, perché avevan fatto tutto un trambusto che ste castagne erano passate in secondo luogo. Arrivano alla rimessa, che è un posto qui. C'era un ruscello. *Al dis*, "Giuggi," *la dis*, "me a n'in pos pù dal dular." "Eh!" *al dis*, "al begh a li ho mazà, i bsigh li ama tira via..." "Oh Dio mama, oh Dio mama," *al dis*, "chè a n so propria pù sa far." *Al dis*, "A me tucò tirare su, zo la stanella, andar su al rusell da l'acqua e," *a dis*, "po' a g feva di sciacqui in sta maniera qui." *Al dis*, "S'a n gh'è mia cal rusell lì la mora."

15) Quando eravamo giovani non ci lasciavano andare a ballare. Bisognava chiedere il permesso ai genitori...Alora una sera dovevano andare a ballare. Dice, "Vai a invitare.." questo e quello, dice "Vai a invitare la Nice." "Eh!" dice, "la Nice sua madre non ce la lascia mica venire eh." *Al dis...* ha, ha, ha... "Ci vado io-Maria. Giuggi?

Alba. Giuggi. *Al dis*, "Volete scommettere che con me ce la lascia venire?" Alora va su, va in casa, *dis*, "Ah, buona sera," "Eh buona sera, cosa sei venuto a fare?" "Guardate son venuto a chiedervi un piacere", *al dis*, "se lasciate venire a ballare la Nice". *Al dis*, "Se ce la lasciate venire mi fate un piacere," *al dis*, "e se non ce la lasciate venire me ne fate due!" "Alora già per quello ce la mando!" *Al dis*, "Al arivà giù cun la Nice", *al dis*, "A v l'ave ditt che"

16) Era sempre quel Giuggi lì, tempo di guerra, no, c'avevan portato via della roba-F. I finimenti del cavallo.

M. Non so i partigiani, no so. Comunque, sto Giuggi va in cerca della sua roba, no. Alora prende un sacco, ci mette dentro l'ombrello, va a San Pellegrino...

Anna: E' vera eh!

Martino: Che era lì che c'era sto concentramento, che andava a cercare sto individuo no, alora c'era una signorina lì che, che lo guardava, *al dis*, guardava sto sacco, *la dis*, "Signorina ha paura delle armi?" *La dis*, "Io sì." "Lontano da quel sacco!"

[Ridono moltissimo]

Dino: [ridendo] C'aveva l'ombrello dentro.

17) Doveva caricare un prete, un prete di Riccovolto, che insomma, le piaceva il vino.

Dice "*Iusun*", *al dis*, "*a m port tu a Vidriola cun la to mulla, che insomma...*" "Sì, sì", *al dis*, "come no". Alora lui per compensarlo dice, "*A tog dre un fiasc ed vin.*"

E fatto sta che partono con questo mulo, il fiasco del vino...

Alba. In cima a un calesse.

Martino: In cima a un biroccio...ha, ha, ha...Quando arrivano a due chilometri, neanche, il biroccio perde la ruota e si ribaltano i due passeggeri, no {tutti ridono}. Alora, il prete fa, *al dis*, "S i v fat mal...?"

Tutti: Don Pigoia.

Martino: don Pigoia? *Al dis*, "Guarda", *al dis*, "*la testa a m la sun rutta, m' al fiasc l è chi.*" [Tutti Ridono]

18) Alora quella d'Iusun, naturalmente, erano in piazza a Piandelagotti.

E va a vedere che gli piaceva molto il vino, no, anch'a st'Iusun. Si mettono in discussione con uno che c'aveva un cane che sembrava un leone, a fa, non avre-,un uomo non avrebbe affrontato questo cane. *Al dis*, "Ma cosa vuoi che sia il tuo cane!" *al dis*, "vallo a prendere," *al dis*, "a me, assolutamente non mi fa niente.

Fernando. Io non ho nessuna paura.

Dino. Si mette la *al dis*, "Cosa scommettiamo?" "Scommettiamo un fiasco di vino", perché lì andavano aa forza di vino, no?

F. A base di fiaschi, sì.

D. Alora, vanno a prendere il cane e veramente era un cane che faceva paura, no? Erano in piazza, *al dis*, lui c'aveva la frusta, perché era un birocciaio sai, come

l'abbiamo già detto anche prima, no. *Al dis*, "Io tengo la frusta in mano, vedrai che il tuo cane, en me fa assolutamente nient", *al dis*. Allora sai, dice, "Dai mandel, mandel cià," *al dis*. Lo manda là, il cane si fermò. *Al dis*, "*Dai, dai, e fag i simitun* [tutti ridono]. *Mandel chì, mandel chì*. *Al dis*, "*E g dè na scurdada!*" E il cane si fermò. Però naturalmente rimase un pochettino male, "*Dai, dai, mandel più in cià, tant che vegna un po' più avsin.*" "*E g dè na frustada,*" *al dis*. Nella schiena, saltò via tutto il pelo, sai. Ma bisogna sentirla da lui, perché c'aveva un modo anche caratteristico poi di dirlo.

Aldina. Fernando lo imita bene.

Fernando. Il cane parte di corsa.

Dino. *Al dis*, "Veh, vai a telefonare a Castlnuov in Garfagnana per vedere se han visto passare il tuo cane".

Fernando. Sì, sì, *al dis*, "*Telefona sübit e dmanda s'è arivaa!*"

18a) Troverai Giotto ch'era un pecoraio.

G. Per dire, a sun un vila, m'anc Giotto l'era un pecoraio.

E s'una lastra su di quella, fece la pittura di un'agnella

G. Allora g'al gis lu

Senti quel grullo cosa mi favella, non era un mammalucco come tene

Cosa ti paragoni o montanaro, non sei capace di dar da be' a un somaro.

G. Allora lui *al dis*,

Certo, non son capace di dar be a un somaro , no

Non son capace e non imparo,

perché il somaro non è mia compagnia,

mi ci son trovato oggi a caso raro,

perchè son venuto in questa trattoria.

Oste! Vieni qua, prendi il denaro,

rendo il posto libero e vo via,

che molti miglia devo far di strada.

Dà da bere al ciucco

quando non ha più biada.

G. E' bella quella lì.

19) Quando c'era l'ombrellaio, quando c'era l'ombrellaio a Frassinoro. C'è sempre di mezzo la mamma della Sara e Iusun, quello dal cane.

D. Eh.

F. Allora, c'è 'sto, st'ombrellaio, va, va a dormire dalla Mariuccia, che sarebbe la mamma della Sara, e c'hanno la casa vicino. Nella notte 'sto vecchio si sente male, ci viene un po' di dissenteria, fa il lavorino nel vaso, perché non c'erano...

D. Non c'erano i bagni.

F. E a un certo momento dice, "*A la but förra*". Butta fuori tutto, eh, e va a finire sulla porta di Iusun. Alla mattina, si alza sua moglie, si alza sua moglie e dice, "*Oh Iuseff*", *al dis*, "*guarda chi*", *al dis*, "*cum i an arvina st'us*", *al dis*, "*S'ani fat?*", *al dis*, "*Val a vder*". "*Ooh!*" *al dis*, "*ma chi acsì*", *al dis*, "*a g'à da eser un qualc aventur in cà d'la Mariuccia*", "*Perché?*", *al dis*, "*Mah*", *dis*, "*chi acsì*" "*Eh*", *la dis*, "*ma guarda che vernisada!*", "*Eh ho capi, adesa a vag a vder...*"

Dino. L'è l'umin.

F. "...a vag a vder che g'a da esser l'umin, qul dagli ombrelli." E infatti va in casa della Mariuccia, "Buon giorno, buon giorno", "Oh Giuseppe, venite" "Avrei bisogno dell'ombrellaio", "Eh", al dis, "l'è chi c u s leva. Gh'a iv un qual..." "No, no", al dis, "a gh'ho da dirg du parulin." Allora arriva l'umberlai, "Buon giorno" [con accento toscano] era un toscano, "Ol dice, signore," insomma, "qualche ombrello?" "No, no". Al dis, "Siete stato voi che ha verniciato la mia porta?" Ha, ha, ha...[altri ridono] "No," dice, "io non..." "No," al dis, "perché lè," al dis, "a gh'i da un culor che," l' dis, "non mi piace." [tutti ridono]

Dino. Perché era verde.

F. Sì. A dis, "No", al dis, "ma guardate, io mi son sentito male..." "Lo so", al dis, "ma quando dovete verniciare le porte, specialmente la mia, a gimm e culor, dmandamm al culor..."

20) Allora sempre Iusun accompagnava, accompagnava i toscani, accompagnava i toscani sopra al monte di là, sopra a Rovolo Romanoro, perché non c'era la strada no? E erano in due, c'era quest Iusun e Cagg [ridono già]. E Cagg, eh, e v'al curdav eh.

Tutti. Sì.

Dino. Allora arriva Cagg in cà di quest Iusun, dice, "Oh, Iuseff, l'è arivà gli amic," perché gli davano un qualche soldino, no, dovevano andare al dis, "Sì, sì. A ven subit," al dis, "aspeta u mument." Va in fondo alla scala, no, c'aveva la scala che andava su nelle camere: "Cesira! Ven giù!" "Sa vo-t tu!?" Eh c'aveva una voce un po' particolare. "A i ven giù c'a io bsunn!" Proprio serio, eh? Quando arriva in fondo gli ha detto, dis, "Supiet al nas, e dam un basin ch'a vag via" [ridono](Anna. Oh, Dio mama!) Perché c'aveva sempre la goccia al naso, no. "Supiet al nas, e damm un basin c a vag via!"

Fernando. "Pulisciti il naso perchè..."

Dino. Eh, ma, dal volt a facevamm dal ridid!

Martino. Nella miseria, diciamo eppure, (Dino. Eh, si divertivano così) eppure era un divertimento per noi, quando potevamo raccogliere certe...[storie].

21) Una sera era a giocare a briscola insieme a lui [Martino] e, era tardi, e aveva dietro un figlio. E allora eravamo lì tutti in silenzio, che era poi tardi dopo mezzanotte così. Si apre la porta, entra sua moglie: "Non è ancora ora di venire a casa?" "Ma sta zitta," a gh'era tuo [si rivolge a Fernando] zio, Padrin, e giugavn insem, "Ma sta zitta!" Come sta zitta? Cul ragazz l'ha da gnir a lett!" "Ma sì, adesa a gnom."

"Cosa!?" Prende 'na sedia, alza sta sedia per picchiargli adosso no?

M. E Iusun si alzò su da seder e al partì.

M.M. E l' Padrin al dis, "me a sto zit, perché se no." E po dopo, quest al passa, alla mattina al ven giù da noi. Viene giù e allora. "Ah, ieri sera Giuseppe le hai prese da tua moglie eh?" "Eh proprio, eh non s'è mia atentada perché mi!"

M. No, no, al dis...

M. M. "No, no ti te li ha chiapa!" "Eh beh, bisonga far a chi ha più giudiz!"

Anna. Ma l'era acsì tribil la Cesira?

22) Eh, *quand la s piciò con la Maria ed Bepp.*

[...] No, c'era, il figlio di questa Cesira, che era appassionato dei colombi, e s'erano andati nella soffitta di un'altra signora, *la ed Bepp.* Allora, questo ragazzo era andato su per prenderli, e questa Maria, lì, convinta che c'andasse a prender della roba, lo picchio sto bimbo, perch'era più grande. E vien sù la Cesira *cun al padell, la g deva dal padlad!* Alura, *passò sù suo padre, Bepp. A n m'arcord che se fusa la Vitoria quel qui gissn "Ma, Bepp, non li andate a dividere col du che lì?" Al dis, "Quand'u sang ariva chì", al dis, "al vag a divider."*

Dino. Che erano poi qui.

Maria. Sì, erano lì.

Dino. Erano lì a ...

Alba. E sua figlia diceva, "bella la mia padella".

Dino. Guarda che son lassù che fanno le padellate. *Al dis, "Va ben, quand'u sang ariva chi, me.."*

Maria. *E gh'i givn, "Non le andate a dividere...?"*

23) Allora adesso ne racconto una di Mario, dato ch'è qui, che mi fa molto piacere no? Allora qui, vi ricordate qui c'era il banco no, il banco di vendita [si alza e fa vedere, perché la stanza in cui siamo era il negozio una volta]. Avevamo le sigarette qui. Va a vedere che nel mezzo giorno, io non venivo mai a servire, a tavola, no. Allora, quel giorno son venuto qui, che lui fumava. "Dammi un pacchetto di sigarette," gli do le sigarette, quand...dopo averlo servito, c'era il passaggio per venire qui, no. *Al dis, "Corri, corri, corri!" "Cosa c'è?"* Quando sono arrivato qui *al dis, "Guarda, c'è uno scimmione che ha rubato una bambina."* C'era Medardo con la figlia, sul davanzale della finestra, che c'era le sbarre, no? "Ma va, ma va, ma non ti vergogni?"

E' vero, ti ricordi?

24) *Alora e passò, e passò Alfredino l'ater dì. L'ater dì, un an fa. E g'ava e so nunin. L'andav su, lè gob anch a lù. Al dis, "Fernando!" A dig, "Sa dis l Alfredino?" "A dis, a dig, che a port a spas u can."*

A g'armagnì tant mal.

25) Sempre Giuggi era abituato che il martedì, e il venerdì riceveva sempre posta.

Onelia: Lo diceva poi lui.

Martino: Dalle ragazze

F. Allora c'erano due dei nostri amici, vanno a pulire in casa della sua zia, che era per le feste di Pasqua ah, a fare un po' di pulizia dell'Eurosia. Fra l'altro poverina non era bella eh, perché è vera?

Dino: Era anziana, vecchia sai...

F. C'aveva una sciarpa, di quei vestiti lunghi...

Allora la misuarano nella busta, ma non ci sta, la tagliano via, le tagliano i piedi [tutti ridono]. La mettan nella busta, trovano il postino che era Giuseppe, "*Giuseppe stasira bsegn che t port la posta a Giuggi, perché tutt i martedì e venerdì ricev-*", "*Sì, sì a g pens mi."*

Siamo là che diciamo il rosario, arriva dentro Beppe, "Giuggi di la posta!" La Marcella subit, "*Zitto eh, abiomma dir u rusari, adesa sta zitt."*

Dino: *Eh zitt, zitt!*

Mentre dice così, gli consegna, se la mette in cal taschino. Non era capace di star zitto, faceva "*Ragacc!*" "*Sta zitt Giuggi, c a t mand fërra!*" Dis, "*L'è seca.*" [tutti ridono] Perché *l'è seca* voleva dir che c'era qualcosa di solido, non era solo carta. Ma non è resistito, no? Prima delle litanie ha preso fuori la busta, pian pianino l'ha aperta, aveva un po' di balbuzie, *al dis* "*L'è- l'è la V- Vrosia*" [tutti ridono tanto] *A la mandà fërra subitt!*

Non era una ragazza, era quella donna lì.

Maria: Era una donna anziana

26) Allora due fidanzati naturalmente che che sempre questo Giuggi che si doveva sposare con una che, che era a qualche chilometro da qui no?

Anna: *O l giva po' lü.*

Martino: *No, no lè vera.*

Tutti: Sì, si dovevan sposare.

Martino: Va beh, ma comunque *lü al giva...* Allora ariva la notizia che sta ragazza è morta. E' morta. Allora sto Giuggi è tutto...{Alba. Affranto}...eh, affranto e indaffarato per andare al funerale, e c'era suo fratello di questa signora qui [Anna].

Anna: Sesto

Martino: Sesto, e sua sorella di Giuggi che era la fidanzata di Sesto. Allora decidono di andare loro tre al funerale, Giuggi, Sesto e la sorella. Allora vanno a cercare i vestiti neri [ridono], perché si dovevano vestire da...Alora io c'avevo un vestito nero, tutto nero no? E me l' vin a dmandar Giuggi. E per Sesto i anden da Pelegrino [ridono]. E' vero, questa è una verità eh! E vanno in prestito di sto vestito e si preparano, la Dina anche lei tutta vestita... {Tutti. Di nero}...di nero e Giuggi *al dis*, "*Sesto tul dre la cruna*" [ridono moltissimo]. Allora partono, vanno in coriera, perché allora non c'avevamo mica le macchine. Vanno alla corriera, quando arrivano lì, c'è una signora lì di Frassinoro, la, la Santina, *la dis* "*In do vani ste du seminarista?*" [ridono] Erano vestiti di nero, due seminaristi, perché allora i seminaristi eran vestiti di nero.

Al dis Giuggi "*Eh, i andomma a un funeral*" [ridono]. Eh, e con questo, proseguono e vanno. Poi la corriera va fino a un certo punto, poi bisognava...[Fernando. Andare a piedi]... andare a piedi, c'era un tragitto da fare a piedi. Allora, partano, vanno a piedi, e, suona il mezzogiorno.

Alba. Le campane

Martino. Le campane che suonavano il mezzogiorno. Giuggi *al dis* "Ecco l'Ave Maria" [tutti ridono]. "*Sesto. Tira fora la cruna c a giamm u rusari*" [ridono moltissimo].

E poi dopo, vanno verso la casa perché, di sta ragazza.

Fernando: Questa Zurma.

Martino: Quando arrivano là che han detto sto rosario e tutto quanto, incontrano il padre no. *Alora is gh'e presentni, 'Soma, u s despias ed quel che v'è suces, de sta desgrazia.*" Insoma, tutto così. *E lü al salta sù ste, al dis* "*Guarda,*" *al dis*, "*e videl,*" *al dis*, "*a l'abiomma pers,*" *al dis*, "*ma la vaca a l'amma salvada.*"

27) C'era Nildo, c'era Bepi, c'eran tutta la squadra. *Al dis*, "*Ragaz andam a veder che chi guerzet i van a let.*" "*Eh, cm'a fomm?*" "*Eh, al dis andam in cima a un salez.*" *Ismino al dis*, "*Me a sun e primm*"

Aldina: *In da Lazarin?*

Fernando: *Sì, lì da cà d' Marcello. C'era un rovolo per le mucche. E va su, su, al dis "Lasm ander, al dis ed co a s ved propria ben. Alora i vlivn andare tuti in do se vdiva ben. Va su, va su, si carica il ramo, con due reggeva, arrivano in quattro si tronca il ramo e andiam dentr tut in dl'acqua. Me i n gh'ande brisa in d l'acqua, però Sesto, Ismino "Dio...!" Non vedevamo poi mica niente veh!?*

28) Era mio cugino, no? Alora il primo dell'anno va con sua sorella, c'aveva una sorella, vanno a dare il buon anno a mia mamma, no? Alora mia mamma fa, *al dis, "adessa che, che a voi altri due vi voglio dare,"* perché c'aveva dei liquori fatti, tutta poi, li facevano a mano...

Fernando. Manuali.

Martino. *Al dis, "Vi voglio dare quello più buono."* [ridono moltissimo] Allora va nella panara lì, c'eran delle bottiglie, prende una bottiglia e vuota i due bicchierini alla sorella e a sto endicappato. Alora, l'andicappato lo butta giù, sa, e la sorella dice, *"Ma, Dio bono, s'a m ai da zia?"* "Oh, Dio", c'ha dato il caglio, sa, quello che facevano cagliare il latte.[ridono]

Alba. *E feva na püzz!*

Martino. Alora, noi altri ragazzi, quando abbiamo saputo la novità, *"Andam a vder s'Aurelio l'à caglià!"* [ridiamo].

29) Ve ne racconto una, l'ultima. Eh, perché faceva anche il dentista, sa in tempo di guerra...

Aldina. Sì faceva il barbiere, faceva il dentista...

Martino. Sì, sì, faceva tutti i mestieri. Allora c'è uno qui, era, era un uomo di chiesa ...[Alba. Santi] [tutti ridono]...va da Giuggi, che c'aveva un dente che faceva male, dice, *"Giuggi, bsugna c t me cav stu dent."* *Al dis, "Eh, metiv a seder Santi," al dis, "c a vag a tor e can."* [ridiamo moltissimo] Alora, l'uomo si mette a sedere, arriva Giuggi col cane, quando spunta col cane, lui si fa il segno della croce...*Al dis, "A n sunn po' mia e diavul eh!"*

30) Un'altra volta, questo è il dentista. Il barbiere, no?

L. Giuggi barbiere?

Fernando. Giuggi barbiere che va da mio zio Angioletto. Alora *la dis, "Sa famm nunin? Famm i cavii?"* *A dis, "I cavii e po' anc la barba."* Allora gli fa i capelli, poi gli fa la barba, arriva qua [indica il mento], qua è difficile col rasoio, eh? Eh, sta lì un po', *al dis, "Saiv Angiulett che a starist ben cun e pizz?"* [risate]

Dino. Perché si era poi sbagliato, eh, lui.

Fernando. *Al dis, "Dai dai, an truar fora dal stori. A tegn i bafi sì, ma e pizz!"* *"Damn a ment a mi, tegni e pizz c'a stav ben".*

D. *"U s'arabiò," al dis, "Eh, m'en gh'e fe mia."*

31) Eh, quella è buffa. Era una moglie che faceva le corna al marito. Il marito lavorava alla diga, sa...

Tutti. Lì a Fontanaluccia.

Fernando. E va beh, e gli viene detto a questo marito, *"Guarda che tua moglie se la dice col brigadiere dei carabinieri".* *"Ma non ci credo!Ma non ci credo!"* *Al dis, "Prova,"* facevano i turni di notte, *al dis, "Stasira, invece d'andare a lavorare, fai*

finta e poi torni indietro". Infatti viene a Casa Gianasi, torna indietro, viene a casa, vede la luce in camera. La porta era aperta, sale e li trova tutt'e due lì. "Oh! Mi deve scusare!" "No, no, non c'è nessuna scusa, niente." "Volevo andare alla finestra perché volevo..." "No, no lei stia calmo, tu lo stesso. Lei piuttosto si veste, si mette le scarpe, le calze, le scarpe," *al dis*, "e poi..." "Ma insomma mi deve scusare, non ho fatto altro che..." "Io non voglio saper niente. Lei si vesta." Si veste, monta su una cassapanca, *al dis*, "Adesso," *al dis*, "monta in spalla." Erano in camera, c'era la scaletta, eh in...a andar giù. "Ma," *dis*, "ma no, ma no." "No, no." Eh, monta in spalla. E scende, i ven fora sempr cun stu in spalla, eh? *E rivano de i punt a gh'era...* *Al dis*, "Senti, hai delle sigarette?" *Al dis*, "Che il m'amazza!" "Fuma na sigaretta." Fuma na sigaretta, "Hai finito?" "Sì." "Monta su." Via, via, via, via, arriva a Pietravolta, così facciam prima. C'era un posto brutto, c'è un precipizio lì, "Scendi." *Al dis*, "Chè i m'amazza da bunn." Tutto di notte eh, succedeva questo? "Hai delle sigarette?" *Al dis*, "Sì, ce n'ho ancora due", "Fuma una sigaretta". Aspetta, fuma una sigaretta, "Hai finito?" "Sì." "Monta su." Risale e via, via, via, arrivano a San Pellegrino.

Aldina. Mamma mia.

Fernando. "Eh", *al dis*, "chì, senz'altro, in un posto isolato..."

Dino. E' la fine.

Fernando. "Alora, ch'hai ancora delle..." *Al dis*, "Ne ho ancora una". "Fuma la sigaretta. Calmo e tranquillo." Questo qui c'era venuto fifa, eh? Alora, finisce ed fumar la sigaretta, *al dis*, "Adesso ti devo dire una cosa", il brigadiere dentro di lui diceva: "Adesso m'amazza e non se ne parla più." "No, no, sta tranquillo," *al dis*, "Guarda, se io ti ritrovo con mia moglie," *al dis*, "questa volta ti ho portato qui, quest'altra volta ti porto a Castelnuovo" [ridono].

E lì è finito.

Aldina. Na bella soddisfazione di portarlo in spalla.

32) Porta il piatto piano. Va bene, *me a tog i me pià, a la fin*. Piatto piano, poi facevo [mima l'azione di andare piano con il piatto in mano]

A ma a gh'arò miss sì quater minut dalla sala alla cucina. Piatto piano. "Ma ti sbrighi?" Era una toscana, "Ti sbrighi?"

"Signora, ma arrivo, sto arrivando". Ma caro mio il piatto piano.

33) E un'altra volta mi manda a fare la spesa, mi diceva perché come le ho detto avevo tredic'anni, togliersi da un paese, che s'parlava *acsi*, a la nostra maniera... *A la fin d'la canzun la dis*, "Devi andare in questa drogheria, devi prendere dei capperi". E io tutta, "Sì, sì, va bene." "Ti faccio un bigliettino." Io dicevo, "No signora, non me lo faccia. Me lo ricordo." Va bene. Vado giù, viene il mio turno, che questo droghiere mi dice, "Oh bimba cusa voi?" Son stata un po' imbambolata e poi gli ho detto, "Voglio 25 grammi di cazzeri!" *L'aise mai ditt!* E questo pancione rideva, con altri due ragazzi. Io non sapevo perché. Andai a casa talmente crucciata che gli dissi, "Come sono ignoranti a Pisa queste persone." "Cosa ti hanno fatto? Cosa ti hanno fatto?" "A," dico, "niente, gli ho chiesto i cazzeri..." Ma Anita cosa dici? Non si dice i cazzeri. Capperi!" Eh dico io ne volevo 25 grammi! Oh, Dio, Dio, Dio, che vergogna!

34) Io per esempio il paletto. Il paletto della porta, io credevo fosse il paletto, quello da tirar su la farina. *La me sgnora la dis*, “quando suona il campanello vieni giù e metti il paletto, lo sai che cos’è?” A dig, “A voglia!” *Mi cerca e palet*, ma non riuscivo a trovarlo. Infatti andei giù, si chiuse la porta, c’avevo i bambini in casa, successe l’ira di Dio. Ma io cercavo questo paletto. C’ vo-t c a sava...

M. Quello per tirar su la farina.

A. Eh, e le “Lo sai che cos’è?” “Eh”, dico, “boia se lo so!” E invece è il paletto della porta, *insomma il cadnacc, cum as chiama. Eh! Ma di lavor!* Sì, allora poi...!

34a) Per esempio c’era una mia zia che dice che la sua signora le diceva, eh, mi zia Margherita, eh, “Povera figliola, ti dispiace essere via lontano dalla mamma?” [fa una voce da donna snob e fredda] *“I n me gnanc* indaviso d’esser via.”

Voleva dire, non mi sembra nemmeno...

“In me gnanc in daviso d’esser via.” Ha, ha, ha...

“Cosa vuol dire daviso?” “Eh, daviso.” Questa me la raccontava poi mia mamma. “In me gnanc in daviso d’esser via.” Almeno mangiavano...ha, ha, ha..Mah!

35) C’era una..... allora era venuta e si dava un po’ di arie, allora quand’è stata a casa *la dis*...ha, ha, ha...”Co-Cos’è questo?” Era un rastrello, messo in terra...e allora...

L. Eh, faceva finta di non riconoscerlo?

Alba. Di non sapere cos’era. E camminando ci...ha, ha, ha...è andata a pestare sopra, il rastrello ha fatto [fa segno del rastrello che le batte in fronte]. C’ha picchiato così, ha, ha, ha. *La dis*, “*Accident a i rastell!*” Ha, ha, ha... [rido]. *Alora t’sa s’a lè!*” Ha, ha, ha!

36) Una volta sono andati a ballare, lui e Ismino sono andati a ballare, a Spervara Martino. No a gh’ern in quattro o cinque.

Alba. Quattro o cinque, in una stanza così. Allora vanno dentro e suonavano. Alora *al dis*, “Andiamo a prender su una ragazza e ce n’erano due o tre a sedere, ha, ha, ha, e allora *al dis*, “Io prendo questa e te *cl’atra*.” Alora va e prendon su ste ragazze da andare a balare. Allora eran grandi!

Martino. Sì, ma davvero, una ragazza grande!

Alba. Alora, l’aveva preso per qui, allora gli dicevano...ha, ha, ha!

Cominciano a ballare *al dis*, “*Angiul*”, si chiamavano così, *al dis*, “*cm’a vala?*” *Al dis*, “Se posso mettere i piedi per terra [ride] io non ci ballo più!” Ha, ha, ha!!!

37) Eh, loro si divertivano. Allora adesso, già che siamo lì, qui davanti c’era uno, era il più anziano.

A. Bella anche questa.

D. Eh?

A. Bella anche questa.

D. C’era un, c’era, si chiamava Arnaldo [...] Sai, loro erano briosi... [...] Allora va a vedere che, lui era il cuciniere, capito? Allora, generalmente la baracca la mettevano vicino a un ruscello sai, per aver l’acqua, per lavarsi poco, ma ...per far la polenta. Allora questo Arnaldo aveva comprato il baccalà, sai, e poi l’aveva legato per la coda, il baccalà e l’aveva messo in questo ruscello, per pulirlo naturalmente.

Allora hanno pensato, al dis, "*Bsugna c'a fam un scherz*," uno scherzo a Arnaldo, eh? Perché non c'avevan poi mica. Allora han detto. Adesso tagliamo la corda che c'ha messo Arnaldo, no, e poi mettiamo una corda più lunga. Hai capito? Allora hanno fatto così, "Arnaldo! Se ne v' il baccalà!" Lui è partito di, di sprombattuta, c'era l'acqua poi alta così, sai...

A. Intanto loro lo lasciavano andare apposta, e il baccalà gli scappava sempre più in là [rido!]

D. Quando prende il baccalà, ha visto che era legato. Ti puoi immaginare, che, diceva sempre "Io bestrega!" Ha, ha, ha! [ridiamo]. *Al dis*, "ma guarda lì, s'i van a pensar", s'era bagnato, ha, ha, ha!

[...] Vedi si divertivano, ecco saltava fuori uno sketch diciamo, una barzelletta così, con niente.

A. E dopo quando tornavano a casa, avevano fatto questo, avevano fatto quell'altro, ridevano, così.

38) D. Eh! Non vedevano l'ora, perché là poi non c'eran mica noi due soli eh. Eravamo quattro del comune di Montefiorino, e quattro del comune di Frassinoro, e allora loro cosa facevano, c'era uno che si chiamava Ludovico – faccio per raccontarne..., è quasi una barzelletta no. Dice, "Era talmente buono questo Ludovico," che dicevano, "Adessa andiamo al bar," no, "e poi intavoliamo il discorso Frassinoro contro Montefiorino e viceversa, così senz'altro Ludovico interviene, che lui paga una cassa di vino." Succedeva così. Si mettevano d'accordo con il proprietario del..., dell'osteria diciamo, del bar. Dicevano, "Guardate che facciamo così e così, ma non litighiamo mica!" Sembra di litigare, sai, facevano apposta, arrivavano a un certo punto che dicevano, "No basta, è ora di smetterla eh! Ma come! *Gh'è bsugn d-, ed litar Frasnur cun qui de cumiün ed Muntfiurin?*" [Ludovico said] [...] A. E lui [Ludovico] pagava da bere, purché smettessero di litigare.

39) Gli piaceva molto andare a giocare a briscola, era pelato completamente. Allora la moglie lo cercava, naturalmente non lo trovava. E andò a finire in quel baretto lì, e c'era una cucina – giocava con un altro, era pelato completamente no? – ha aperto la porta, va a vedere che la porta si apriva proprio che nascondeva un pochetino il marito. Quando si è affacciata, ha visto il marito, gli ha piantato una scoppola nella testa! Ha, ha, ha!

A. Lui stava facendo "*Vala bénn questa?*" Capito, quant si gioca..? *E allora le la gh'a ditt, "E questa vala bén?"*.

D. Ha, ha, ha! Sì, è vera!

40) Quando organizzavamo qualche cosa c'era sempre anche Giuggi. "Allora sei venuto con il, il prosciutto?" Cos'era il prosciutto: era il violino.

[interruzione...]

No ma allora ti racconto, ti racconto di Giuggi no? Allora va a vedere che venne organizzato una cena, sai, tra tutti noi, c'erano anche le donne, eh!?

[...]

E allora io gli dissi vero, con Giuggi, mah, c'hai il prosciutto dietro. *A dis*, "Ce l'ho sì, in macchina!" Però c'era Fernando, aveva il fratello che suonava veramente bene la fisarmonica. Lui suonava [un secondo di silenzio in cui mi fa un gesto che significa 'benissimo'], ma suonava che non ti dico. Si chiamava Davide. Allora io

...eh ..., perché anch'io sono, la mia parte la voglio fare – non da musicista – sono andato là da Davide dico, “Davide, mi raccomando dai na frenata eh, che vogliam sentire Giuggi, un assolo.” *Al dis*, ...di fatti loro eran lì che suonavano, che, Giuggi c'aveva la, la musica davanti, no. Dico, “Prima di tutto, Giuggi, devi girare il foglio perché è a la rovescio.” Perché allora ci...*Al dis*, “Ma per me è lo stesso,” dice, “io, se è a rovescio.” Perché non sapeva, ha, ha, ha, “per me se è girato così, è lo stesso.” “Allora continua come vuoi.” A un certo punto, Davide, la fisarmonica, si ferma di botto no? Allora noi abbiamo sentito: chii, chii, chii [suono stridulo insopportabile]. Ti puoi immaginare a ridere.

Ma lui non se la prendeva mica eh, non è che lui si offendesse, ha, ha, ha, no!

41) *Ma alora a t'in conto* un'altra. Alora vai a *vder ch'a gh'era* una che si chiamava Lucetta, Lucetta e si era, si era sposata con uno che si chiamava...eh [frustrazione perché non ricorda]eh, eh...

A. Ah, non so non mi viene in mente.

D. Eh, eh, ecco vedi finisce tutto, ha, ha, ha...

In conclusione insomma che sono andati a dormire sul corridoio, sai. C'erano le scale no, poi c'era un pochettino di corridoio, e hanno messo il letto lì.

A. Che amnesia.

D. Sibò.

A. Sibò! Sì!

D. [...] Alora, raccontava, la giva. Alora, a *gh'a u lett no*, con le foglie di frumentone, sai. E poi avevamo una piuma.

A. Allora con le penne di galline facevano i materassi, perché la lana non c'era ...

D. Non usava sai il materasso di lana, eccetera...

A. No, no, no, facevano con la penna, proprio la penna di gallina. Non la pennna d'oca, che quelle...La penna di gallina facevano questi ...piumoni e li mettevano sotto.

D. Allora, era una donna simpaticissima che parlava in toscano, quand'era il momento. “Quando...[cambia voce e fa quella di lei] quando sci sciamo alzati [è così che fa l'accento toscano], *al dis*, “sembrava un pollaio,” *al dis*, “*era gnu förra tutta la penna*,” *al dis*, “dapertütt.”

A. *La vulava dapertütt*.

D. “*La vulava dapertütt*”, *al dis*...Ha, ha, ha! Ma sentirla da un'anziana, hai capito? Eh, ci fermavamo qui così davanti, vèh, e ...

L. Ah, quindi voi eravate ragazzi.

D. No, già, eravamo già uomini, uomini via. Dopo guerra eh.

L. Aveva l'età dei vostri genitori lei.

A. Oh, sì, sì, se non anche più vecchia.

42) E lui le raccontava su di lui. Perché io quando andavo a farmi i capelli da lui, diceva che andava al palazzo Europa [inserisce Modena nell'immaginario] a fare, cioè, lui era un parrucchiere inventato, no? Barbiere. Violinista, tutto.

Io mi ricordo c'aveva la botteghina dove c'è adesso il bar di Elio, dove abita la Nanda, c'era la bottega lì. E mia madre mi portava lì a tagliarmi i capelli, che tra l'altro andar lì era una tortura perché lui ti prendeva i capelli così, poi cominciava a tagliarli...

“Io son stato al palazzo Europa a fare il corso da parrucchiere. Alla fine i professori *sa t cus i an dett?* ‘Lei, signor Ferrari, ci deve insegnare a noi!’” Me lo raccontava lui. E lui lo sapeva che non era vero. Ma si divertiva, e a tutti gli ha sempre raccontato questa storia. Lei dovrebbe insegnare a noi e non noi a lei. Boh. Così dava la sua potatina, costava poco e nient. Tu andavi via e lui non aspettava il prossimo cliente, andava al bar un’altra volta, a raccontar due balle a Beppe e poi tornava qua e via.

43) Giuggi aveva di bello che ci provava. Una volta cavò le patate, andò a cavare patate a un tipo che era anziano e via. Sol che invece di andarci, c’è il picco che è fatto con due denti, no? Lui ci andò con la zappa. Sol che la zappa, ogni volta che prendeva ‘na patata la tagliava. Alla fine su, ma erano dieci, quindici chili di patate, ce n’era più di tre quarti che erano tagliate in mezzo, eran da buttar via. Le raccolse proprio quelle più piccoline, quelle che aveva preso con la zappa e gli disse, “*Oh, mi a g l’ho missa tutta. Pù d’acsi a n psia far!*” Cioè gliele ha tagliate tutte.

Appendix 4

Stills from the Video Interviews

Getting Together



Fig. 1 24th of September 2005 in Dino's living room.

The Storytellers



Fig. 2 Dino, Fernando, Dino, Giacobbe, Martino.



Fig. 3 Ottavia, Anna, Maria, Alba.



Fig. 4 Aldina competing with her husband, as she tells a different story for Onelia.

Moments from the narratives in the corpus



Fig. 5 “We went in, [in] the photographic studio you know, all beautiful.”
(Dino Tazioli – narrative 5)



Fig. 6 “And so the moment came when they told us to go in to the photographic studio.
Spotlights, you know, here and there, everywhere.” (Dino Tazioli – Narrative 5)



Fig. 7 “There was a blond lady you know, at the
table [he means the counter], taking orders,
right?” (Dino Tazioli- Narrative 5)



**Fig. 8 “: “She said, ‘Always like this mamma?’ ‘Oh yes’, she says, ‘Menga, always like this!’”
(Maria Biondini – narrative 6b).**



**Fig. 9 “She picks up a chair and lifts it up, to hit him with it, right?”
(Alba Ferrari- Narrative 21).**



**Fig. 10 “He says, “Look,” he says, “my head is broken, but the flask is here!”
(Martino – narrative 17)**

Moments of Laughter



Fig. 11 Maria, Dino and Fernando.



Fig. 12 Tullio and Martino.



Fig. 13 Ottavia and Giacobbe



Fig. 14 Tullio, Dino, Onelia and Aldina.



Fig. 15 Dino, Alba and Maria.

Remembering through stories



Fig. 16 Mario, as Dino begins a story about one of Mario's famous punch-lines.



Fig. 17 Mario, as he begins to remember.
Dino asks him "Is it right? Can you remember it?!"



Fig. 18 Mario remembers and laughs.